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BURMA: ASSESSING OPTIONS FOR U.S. ENGAGEMENT

by

Dennis S. Heaney

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Thesis Advisor:

Anna Simons

Second Reader:

Brian Greenshields

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BURMA: ASSESSING OPTIONS FOR U.S. ENGAGEMENT

Dennis S. Heaney
Major, United States Army
B.S., University of Washington, 1985

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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June 2009

Author: Dennis S. Heaney

Approved by: Anna Simons
Thesis Advisor

Brian Greenshields
Second Reader

Gordon H. McCormick
Chairman, Department of Defense Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will provide a background look at Burma's recent history from World War II to present day to examine how the current state of affairs came about in the country. Burma's diverse ethnic groups and the nearly continuous insurgencies since World War II, will be analyzed relative to a short period of democracy (following British colonial rule) from 1948 to 1962, to repressive military rule from 1962 to today.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The crisis between the United States and Burma arising from the actions and policies of the Government of Burma, including its engaging in large-scale repression of the democratic opposition in Burma, that led to the declaration of a national emergency on May 20, 1997, and its expansion on October 18, 2007, and April 30 2008, has not been resolved. These actions and policies are hostile to the U.S. interests and pose a continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.¹

George W. Bush
May 16, 2008

In May 2008, President Bush publicly identified that the policies of the Government of Burma as a threat to the national security of the United States. Considering the gravity of this statement, it would seem that immediate and aggressive action on the part of the United States toward the ruling Burmese junta would have been warranted and was imminent. However, the United States confirmed what it has done for the past 20 years, which is to rely on economic sanctions to influence the Burmese Government to adopt more democratic and humane policies towards its people. Yet, the reality is that U.S. (and Western nations) sanctions have not eliminated or reduced the ruling junta's repressiveness of its people.

Given that sanctions have had little impact on Burmese Government policies, this thesis addresses how authoritarian military governments in Burma have managed to gain and maintain power through brutal counterinsurgency measures, co-opting the opposition, and developing regional relationships which have shielded the regime from international influence.

The present military regime in Burma has been in power since 1988. Following severe crackdowns on Burmese pro-democracy movement in that same year, and the subsequent national election in 1990, the results of which would have put the military out of power, Burma's military leaders nullified the election and resumed control of the

¹George W. Bush, Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to Burma (110th Congress, 2d Session, May 16, 2008) House Document 110-113.

country. Prior to 1988, Burma was ruled by the dictator Ne Win who grabbed power in a coup in 1962. Then as now, Ne Win subjected the people of Burma to harsh treatment in order to maintain his grip on power.

For 47 years, the Burmese have been subjected to authoritarian rule and have lived in fear of forced relocation, and violence from military and police actions. During this period, the country's military rulers have consistently underdeveloped the economy. The country has large deposits of natural gas and oil, which have not been tapped to benefit the people. Despite so much natural resource potential, Burma ranks in the "top" ten of undeveloped states and has become the second largest producer of illicit opium in the world (behind Afghanistan).²

Burma's current military leaders have little interest in promoting a legitimate state or the well-being of their citizens. They are instead driven to retain a firm grip on power and to increase their personal wealth. To remain in power they have relied on strong internal population control measures, periodically purging the military and intelligence services, and recently turning to building ties with powerful neighbors to ensure security and expand their wealth and holdings. The ruling junta seems unconcerned about Western diplomacy, economic pressure, or the suffering of its people. This was made evident in the wake of Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Following Nargis, the Burmese leaders refused aid from Western nations despite an estimated 138,000 Burmese killed or missing, and as many as 2.4 million people affected by the cyclone with half that many in need of assistance.³ Clearly, the regime was willing to deny access to Western nations and sacrifice the well-being of its citizens in order to minimize its exposure to the world, and to deny access to Western nations.

Yet, despite the Burmese government's fear of Western intrusion, the junta has not been totally isolationist. The government has benefitted from investment and business generated by international corporations operating in the country. The junta has

² Lianna Sun Wyler, "Burma and Transnational Crime." *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* (2008): 4.

³ IRIN, "Myanmar: UN Reports Improvement in Cyclone Cooperation." *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, <http://www.irinnews.org/> (accessed August 18, 2008).

also prioritized expanding trade with rising industrial neighbors, China and India and, in the past decade, has even strengthened ties with long time rival Thailand. Burma joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997 and thereby expanded relations with the more prosperous countries in Southeast Asia.⁴ All of this suggests that Burma sees how it can expand its economy without the West, though the regime's paranoid leaders appear somewhat hesitant to allow large-scale foreign involvement in Burma even by non-Westerners.

Despite the lure of foreign investment from India and China, the junta remains centered on its main objective; to maintain internal control. Burma is ethnically diverse, with over 100 languages spoken by a total of 55 million people. Insurgent movements among the ethnic minorities in Burma have been present since the colonial days of British rule in the nineteenth century. Ongoing and present-day insurgencies involve both minority ethnic groups along the borders and the majority pro-democracy movement located in Burma's populated areas.

Geographically, Burma is a country with a central river basin opening up to the Indian Ocean to the south, and surrounded in horseshoe fashion by hills and mountains bordering India and Bangladesh in the west, with China to the north and northeast, and Thailand and Laos to the east. The junta has focused the Burmese Army on quelling the numerous insurgencies that have created problems, but never posed a decisive threat to the regime. To weaken these movements, the Burmese government has used various techniques from forcefully relocating minority ethnic peoples and destroying their villages to brokering cease-fire agreements and offering concessions to insurgent leaders in exchange for their cooperation.

Apart from these insurgencies on the country's peripheries, the junta has also run up against pro-democracy movements demanding free elections and an end to authoritarian rule. Since 1962, several pro-democracy protests have been put down harshly by the Army and police, the most recent being the 2007 "Saffron Revolution" by Buddhist monks. The monks were subdued only after hundreds of protestor deaths.

⁴ Michael Green and Derek Mitchell, "Asia's Forgotten Crisis; A New Approach to Burma," *Foreign Affairs* (2007), 149.

Historically, Burma's pro-democracy movements have originated in the larger interior cities and have attracted little support from the ethnic groups on the country's borders. The lack of a unified effort between insurgent and pro-democracy movements in Burma has eased the government's efforts to crush its opposition and retain control.

It might seem hard to imagine given communications today that Burma does not feel more threatened by international exposure of its repressive ways. The Burmese government has recognized a need to control the flow of information into and out of the country by limiting internet and cell phone use throughout Burma. However, despite its efforts, the junta has had an increasingly difficult time controlling information flows as telecommunication technology improves. During the Saffron Revolution, for instance, video imagery captured violence by the military against the protestors. Burma has been reprimanded on numerous occasions by the United Nations for repressive actions. It is no secret that the Burmese Government uses harsh and cruel methods on its people. Yet, beyond announcing sanctions, no outside actors have made moves to dispossess or displace the government.

As one of the world's top producers of illegal narcotics, Burma may not technically pose a direct security threat outside its borders. Indeed, despite the rhetoric used by the U.S. and the UN to call for an end to the junta's repression and human rights abuses, Burma's sovereignty remains intact. One of the few actions that could cause this to change might be Burma's pursuit of a nuclear program. In 2007, Burma and Russia signed an intergovernmental cooperation agreement to establish a "nuclear studies" center in Burma, which will include a light water-moderated nuclear reactor.⁵ Presumably, if Burma goes on to then pursue a nuclear weapons program that could "grant" the country a status similar to that of North Korea or Iran, both of which use the threat of nuclear weapons development as a bargaining chip when dealing with the United States. Of course, developing a nuclear program could also backfire on Burma, as the specter of Burma turning into a nuclear security threat could lead to more direct intervention by the U.S. But for now, Burma has not crossed any thresholds that warrant

⁵ Paul Kerr, "Russia, Burma Sign Nuclear Agreement," *Arms Control Today*, June 2007.

direct intervention by any one country. Paradoxically, because Burma poses no immediate direct threat it becomes challenging for critics to develop courses of action, apart from sanctions, that might directly affect the regime.

It is difficult to exert influence on Burma when the rulers continue to line their pockets with revenue derived from international corporations operating in the country. Businesses, which are motivated by profits, turn a blind eye to atrocities committed by the junta. Burma also is shielded from the full effect of U.S. sanctions by its immediate neighbors who are interested in trade and resource exploitation. Consequently, Burma's rulers have little incentive to change their policies, particularly when they do not need the U.S. or the West for protection, trade, or as an outlet for their exports.

However, this does not mean there are not certain steps the U.S. could take to *indirectly* apply pressure. This thesis will touch on what these are. Meanwhile, what can the U.S. learn from its experience with Burma thus far? The thesis will explore answers to other questions as well.

Chapter II will provide an overview, to include a brief description of Burma's geography, people, and history focusing on the post-World War II period to the present. This chapter will describe how Burma's geography and settlement patterns have created conditions for the separation of ethnic groups and impeded unified efforts by the opposition to put pressure on the government to change. Chapter II will also trace the political evolution of Burma after the departure of the British, when Burma briefly experienced democracy before the advent of military rule.

Chapter III will examine the control measures the junta has imposed to thwart insurgent efforts and the pro-democracy movements. Burma's counterinsurgency measures have been effective against multiple insurgent movements and the regime has maintained an aggressive program of relocation, intelligence gathering, and human trafficking to undermine the insurgents. This chapter will also look at the government's involvement in the drug trade.

In Chapter IV, I will examine how the Burmese government has maintained national sovereignty despite its repressive policies. This chapter will consider how the

government has tapped into natural resources to build up foreign currency trading with countries that overlook human trafficking, human rights abuses, and environmental degradation. Chapter IV will discuss Burma's involvement with multinational corporations, its neighbors, the European Union, and ASEAN, and the effect these interactions have on Burma's ability to retain its cruel policies.

The Conclusion will investigate possible options for the United States. I will describe the sanctions currently in place against Burma and their effect on the junta. I will then consider two variants of engagement. First, are there incentives the U.S. can use to sway the regime toward more moderate policies? Second, are there any military measures that the U.S. would want to use to create reform? Meanwhile, if regime change is possible, what are some of the immediate and long-term challenges a new government would face in such an ethnically and politically divided country?

The thesis will conclude with a set of policy recommendations and a cautionary note.

II. BURMA OVERVIEW

A. INTRODUCTION

Burma is a country not in the forefront of international reporting. The ruling junta has intentionally isolated Burma from the world and directed most of its efforts toward keeping tight control of its population. Because of its seclusion, Burma does not receive a great deal of notoriety outside of Asia, and therefore the country remains a bit of a mystery to Westerners. This chapter will provide a brief background of Burma's geography, history, and demographics to serve as a backdrop for the topics discussed in subsequent chapters.

B. GEOGRAPHY

Burma is a country largely shaped by its geography. In area, it is about the same size as France and Belgium combined.⁶ Situated between India, China, and Thailand, Burma covers 240,000 square miles marked by a rugged horseshoe of mountains surrounding the central Irrawaddy plain.⁷ The Irrawaddy River is the largest river in Burma, but it is flanked by several other rivers (Sittang, Salween, and Chindwin - which drains into the Irrawaddy) which flow south from the mountains, to create a fertile basin in the middle of the country prior to emptying into the Indian Ocean. Opening up to the Indian Ocean to the south, Burma's coastline stretches almost 1200 miles across the Bay of Bengal with numerous accessible ports, most notably in the Irrawaddy River Delta.

⁶ Burma – Geography, <http://www.rothwell.force9.co.uk/burmaweb/geography.htm/> (accessed February 18, 2009).

⁷ Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change* (London: Minority Rights Group International, London, 2002), 6.



Figure 1. Map of Burma

C. RESOURCES

Burma has traditionally exported natural resources such as jade and teak and was the world's largest exporter of rice in the early twentieth century. More recently, oil and natural gas have dominated the extracted resources Burma sends abroad.

D. DEMOGRAPHICS

The Burmese are mainly Buddhist (89% of the population). The remainder of the population is mainly split between Christians (4%) and Muslims (4%) with animists and other religions comprising the rest (3%).⁸ Burma's rulers generally were of Burman ethnicity and divisions between Burmans and minority groups have existed throughout the country's history. With a population of close to 52 million people, Burma is one of the poorest nations in Asia despite its wealth of natural resources.⁹

E. STATES, DIVISIONS, CAPITAL

Burma is divided into states and divisions per the 1974 Constitution. The seven states – Kachin, Sagaing, Chin, Rakhine, Shan, Kayin, and Mon – are inhabited by the larger minority ethnic groups and occupy the Burmese border to the west, north, and east. These states are generally in the hilly and mountainous areas and are difficult to access, which is one reason why the Burmese Government has struggled to keep tight control on the states' ethnic inhabitants. The seven divisions (largely inhabited by Burmans) are Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Tanintharyi, and Sagaing.¹⁰ These divisions are located in the interior of the country where the government exerts and can exert greater control over the population.

The capital of Burma until 2007 was Rangoon. In 2007, the ruling junta constructed a heavily fortified and isolated capital area farther into the interior of the

⁸ US State Department, "Burma," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35910.htm> (accessed March 1, 2009).

⁹ CIA, "The World Fact Book-Burma," <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> (accessed February 19, 2009).

¹⁰ The terms "Burman" and "Burmese" are used in their traditional British context. "Burman" refers to the majority ethnic group in the country while the term "Burmese" refers to all peoples of the country of Burma. "Burmese," however, is also the language spoken by the "Burman" ethnic group.

country, at Naypyidaw near the township of Pyinmana. The geographic division of the country and relocation of the capital highlight some of the core problems facing the modern Burmese. Namely, that Burma is a nation that is sharply divided along ethnic lines and ruled by a self-serving and paranoid military junta.

F. ETHNIC GROUPS

The complexity of life in Burma is reflected in its ethnic divisions which have long impacted politics in Burma. The majority Burman ethnic group makes up almost two-thirds of the population. The predominant minority ethnic groups consist of the Mon, Shan, Rakhine, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, and the Chin who occupy the periphery states of the country. The ethnic groups described below are not all the ethnic groups there are in Burma. Many sub-ethnic groups exist within the larger ethnic groups, and the ethnic groups are also not as cleanly divided as are the states. Portions of ethnic groups have been absorbed into other ethnic groups. The descriptions below pertain to the groups most easily identified.

1. Burman

The Burmans descended onto the Irrawaddy plain from the mountainous areas of modern day Tibet and established the first kingdoms as city-states. The Burmans initially conquered the Mon, who were the earliest people to settle in Burma. Under their king, Anawratha, the Burmans adopted Theravada Buddhism in the eleventh century and despite Anawratha's attempts to stamp out animism, beliefs in nat or spirits continue today (adherence to these beliefs is common in Burma and superstitions have influenced policies enacted by the country's leadership).¹¹ Although the Burmans have formed alliances with some of the other groups in Burma out of necessity in the past, for the past millennium they have been unable to unite the separate ethnic groups in Burma.

The Burmans have consistently resisted outside influence in Burma. When Indian immigrants flocked to Burma to farm rice as cultivation and production grew under the

¹¹ Robert I. Rotberg, *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998): 13.

British, the Burmans, following independence, pressured Indians to leave the country.¹² The current ruling junta claims unity exists among Burma's ethnic groups, but, in reality, the Burman-dominated government has tirelessly worked to undermine the power base of other groups. Through state sponsored education, the Burmans have promoted Burmese as the national language and infused their version of history and culture nationwide.

2. Mon

The Mon were the earliest settlers on the Irrawaddy Plain. The Mon had extensive and early impacts not only in Southern Burma, but also in Thailand, and they are linguistically related to the Khmer in Cambodia.¹³ The Mon brought Buddhism to Burma, which was adopted by the Burmans. The Mon kings originally ruled over much of lower Burma, but struggled for power with the Burmans from the time of the latter's arrival in the ninth century. Following the capture of Pegu by Alaungpaya in the eighteenth century, the visibility of the Mon culture and territory declined.¹⁴ Also, after defeat at the hands of the Burmans, many Mon fled to Thailand from where Burma's contemporary Mon draw support.

Following Burma's independence from the British in 1948, some Mon formed the insurgent Mon National Defense Organization (MNDO) devoted to the establishment of an independent country.¹⁵ The MNDO was followed by the Mon United Front and the New Mon State party.¹⁶ The Mon are still actively resisting the present government, but they are small in number and pose only a minor threat to the ruling junta. The Mon reside mainly along the coast of the Andaman Sea in the Southeastern part of the country. Mon leaders claim a present-day population of over 4 million, but only around 1 million Mon-speakers are officially identified by that name.¹⁷

¹² David I. Steinberg, *Turmoil in Burma* (Norwalk: Eastbridge, 2006), 236.

¹³ Ibid., 64.

¹⁴ Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 17.

¹⁵ George A. Theodorson, "Minority Peoples in the Union of Burma," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* (1995) 11-12.

¹⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷ Ibid.

3. Karen

The Karen are the largest ethnic minority group in Burma and their politics are the most complex of any of Burma's ethnic groups in Burma.¹⁸ The Karen State lies in the southeastern portion of Burma bordering Thailand to the east. The term 'Karen' refers to 20 subgroups of Karen-speaking peoples who come from diverse religious, cultural, and geographical backgrounds.¹⁹ The two dominant subgroups are the Sgaw, who are mainly Christian and occupy the hill area of the Karen State, and the Pwo, who are Buddhist and live in the lowlands. Large numbers of Karen live outside of the Karen State in the Irrawaddy Delta area and in the Tanintharyi (Tenassarim) Division, with a substantial Karen population also residing in Rangoon and the surrounding area.

Throughout their history, the Karen have been dominated by their more powerful neighbors, the Burmans, the Mon, and the Siamese (Thais). In the nineteenth century, Baptist missionaries converted many of the Karen from animism to Christianity. This conversion had a long lasting effect as the Karen began to assert their influence in the region. The Karen sided with the British in their wars with the Burmans which created lasting resentment among the Burman majority. In retaliation for aiding the British in the Second Anglo-Burman War, for instance, the Burmans burned every Karen village within a fifty-mile radius of Rangoon.²⁰

The Karen acceptance of Western education led to large numbers of Karen assuming positions of prominence in British Burma's administration. At the beginning of World War II, the Karen remained loyal to the British and when the Japanese took control of the country, the Burma Independence Army (BIA) took hostage and brutally executed almost two thousand Karen civilians.²¹ The Karen fought alongside the British and Americans when they retook Burma from the Japanese and the Karen expected to gain their own independent state from the British in return for their loyalty. These expectations were short lived, however.

¹⁸ Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 16.

¹⁹ Ardeth Maung Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma: Diverse Voices, Uncertain Ends*, Policy Study 45 (Southeast Asia) (Washington D.C.: East-West Center, 2008) 3.

²⁰ Theodorson, *Minority Peoples*, 3.

²¹ Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma*, 5.

When the Burman-dominated government under U Nu took power in 1948, the animosity that existed between the Burmans and the Karen led to a constitution in which the Karen were not afforded the right to secede (a right that was granted to the Shan and the Karenni). The government, made up largely of members of the Burman Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), demanded that the Karen National Union (KNU), the largest Karen political party, and members of its armed force, the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), turn in their weapons.

In 1949, shortly after Karen soldiers in the government army mutinied, the Karen under the KNU's political leadership launched a rebellion directed at the Burman-dominated government. The Karen insurgency has been ongoing for decades now. When peace talks between the Burmese Government and the KNU broke down in 1995-6, fighting quickly resumed.²² In recent years, the government has applied harsh measures against the Karen and forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of them. Many have fled across the Thai border where they occupy refugee camps while others have relocated in the hill areas on the eastern border. There appears to be no end to the struggle in sight.

4. Shan

The Shan make up the second largest ethnic minority group in Burma, comprising about 6% of the overall population.²³ The Shan State is located in a mountainous area in northeastern Burma bordering China, Laos, and Thailand. The Shan, like the Thais and Laotians, originated in China and the Shan native language is Thai. The Shan migrated into northeastern Burma from the Nanchao Kingdom in Yunnan. Their migration greatly accelerated when the Nanchao Kingdom was conquered by Kublai Khan in 1253.²⁴ After Kublai Khan destroyed the Burman capital at Pagan in 1287, the Shan sacked the city-state in 1299, and dominated Burma until the sixteenth century.²⁵

Shan rule was marked by a great deal of in-fighting, much of which revolved around the Shan feudal political system built around *sawbwases*, a type of principality.

²² Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 16.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Theodorson, *Minority Peoples*, 5.

²⁵ Ibid.

After Shan power declined in the sixteenth century, the Shan maintained independence from the Burmans only to ally with the Burmans in the face of foreign invaders. When the British colonized Burma, they allowed the Shan to maintain their *sawbwases*, which the British taxed. After independence, the Shan States joined the Union of Burma with the promise that they could secede in ten years if they so desired.²⁶ When the Burmese government attempted to weaken the *sawbwases* and withdrew the promise of secession, the Shan revolted in 1959 in order to form an independent nation. The Shan pushed for federalization of the minority states in Burma but their initiative was squashed by Ne Win and his military government when he took power in 1962.

The Shan have since maintained an insurgency against the Burmese government. The largest of their armed groups is the Shan State Army (SSA). The United Wa State Army (UWSA), was described by one U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency official in 2002 as “the dominant heroin trafficking group in Southeast Asia, and perhaps the world.”²⁷ Smaller groups, such as the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA) and the Shan United Army (SUA) merged over time to form the 15,000-strong Mong Tai Army (MTA). Like the UWSA, the MTA became a major narco-trafficker but surrendered to the SLORC in 1996.

The Burmese Army imposed its Four Cuts policy (see Chapter III) on the Shan state between 1996 and 1998, ordering 300,000 Shan from 1,400 villages to leave their homes.²⁸ The Shan insurgency continues to the present day.

5. Kachin

The Kachin are also Tibeto-Burman descendants and migrated around 700 A.D. to settle in the northern mountains of Burma.²⁹ In doing so, they drove the Chin, Shan, and Palaung out of the northern area of Burma. Although Kachin make up only a small

²⁶ Theodorson, *Minority Peoples*, 6.

²⁷ Dan Murphy "Burmese Drugs Fuel Regional Strife; Under a Cloud of Drug Suspicion: Burma Accused Thailand of Supporting 'Terrorist' Groups on Friday," *The Christian Science Monitor* (2002): <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed February 4, 2009).

²⁸ Christina Fink, *Living Silence: Burma Under Military Rule* (Bangkok: White Lotus Company Ltd. 2001) 125.

²⁹ John F. Cady, *The United States and Burma* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) 8.

portion of the population of Burma (1.5 million, 2%), the Kachin State is large and second in size only to the Shan State.³⁰ Kachin are predominantly Christian, the result of Baptist and Christian missionary work and have a reputation for being fierce fighters.³¹ Because of their tenacity, they were heavily recruited by the British to serve in the British Burmese Army. Thanks to their reputation as warriors and given the hilly nature of their terrain, outsiders mostly left the Kachin alone to raid and tax caravans passing between Burma and China. While the Burmans and Shan welcomed the Japanese during World War II, the Kachin and Karen resisted the invasion and worked with the British and Americans in their unconventional warfare campaigns against the occupiers.

The Kachin State was created at independence in 1948 on the condition that the Kachin give up claims to the right of secession.³² In 1961, following U Nu's push to make Buddhism the state religion, the Kachin reacted by forming the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The Kachin State became a major site of insurgency and between 1961 and 1986 several tens of thousands of Kachin were estimated to have been killed, and over 100,000 Kachin villagers were forcibly displaced by the Burmese Army.³³ During this same period, the narcotics trade became a main source of revenue for the Kachin.³⁴

The Kachin agreed to a cease-fire with the Burmese Government in 1994. The Burmese Army occupied portions of the Kachin State leading to a rise in narcotics trafficking in the state.³⁵

6. Rakhine (Arakanese)

Burma's Rakhine State lies in the western part of the country bordering Bangladesh and is adjacent to the Bay of Bengal to the west. Originally known as

³⁰ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999) 30.

³¹ Ibid., 45.

³² Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 16.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Rotberg, *Burma*, 189. The Kachin reversed their narcotics policy in the late 1980s and developed measures against opium cultivation after their leadership saw addiction rates rise in the Kachin State.

³⁵ Ibid.

Arakan, the Rakhine State is separated by mountains from the central plains of Burma and, because of this divide, the Arakanese were able to maintain their independence from Burma until the late eighteenth century.³⁶ Two major ethnic groups, the Rakhine (Buddhist) and the Rohingya (Muslims), inhabit the Rakhine State with an unofficial population of 5 million, of where approximately 1.5 million are Rohingya. ³⁷ Early Muslim settlements in Arakan date back to the seventh century AD and after the conversion of King Narameikhla to Islam in 1404, Arakan became a majority Muslim kingdom. ³⁸

Buddhist influence grew in Arakan. In 1785, the Burman king Bodapaya conquered Arakan and the independent kingdom now came under Burman influence. In 1824, the British East India Company gained control of Arakan following the First Anglo-Burmese War. The British did not attempt to unify the Arakanese with the other Burmese ethnic groups and Arakan came increasingly under Indian influence. Prior to independence in 1947, General Aung San proposed not all states should receive regional autonomy with the provision of being able to secede after ten years. ³⁹ With the death of Aung San and U Nu's declaration of Buddhism as the state religion, the Arakan Muslims quickly became alienated.

Persecution of the Rohingya continues and the Burmese Government has moved non-Muslims into the Rakhine State to dampen the Muslim influence. In reaction, low level insurgent movements have developed along the Bangladesh border, and the Burmese government has implemented severe control measures on the Muslim population. The Rohingya, for the most part, do not possess Burmese citizenship and their rights are much more restricted than those of the Rakhine. Since the military takeover of Burma, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled over the Bangladesh border and crowded Rohingya refugee camps exist just inside Bangladesh.

³⁶ Theodorson, *Minority Peoples*, 12.

³⁷ Syed Serajul Islam, "State Terrorism in Arakan," in *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, 325-351 (Northhampton: Edward Elgar, 2007) 326.

³⁸ Ibid., 327.

³⁹ Ibid., 328.

7. Chin

The Chin State is located in the mountainous northwest portion of Burma on the Assam, India-Bangladesh border. Constituting over 40 dialect sub-groups, the Chin are the most diverse ethnic nationality in Burma and their population is an estimated 1.5 million.⁴⁰ Many Chin move back and forth between India and Burma. Descended from Tibetan tribes, the Chin were animists and preliterate before the arrival of Western missionaries who converted many to Christianity.⁴¹

Under the British, the Chin were not granted independence and remained under the rule of the Burman kings; the Chin did not mount an insurgency following independence as did so many of the other minority ethnic groups. The situation for the Chin changed dramatically following the 1988 pro-democracy protests, when many Chin students went underground and formed the Chin National Front.⁴² Fighting has grown since the Burmese Army crackdown and many Chin have fled across the Indian border.

All political parties in the Chin State have been banned by the ruling junta and the army has resorted to forced labor and even supposedly encouraged soldiers to marry Chin girls in order to infiltrate their families and villages. There have been further reports of discrimination by the government against Chin Christians, including restrictions on the building of churches and harassment of local pastors.⁴³ The government has imprisoned several Chin leaders for protesting government policies and there appears to be no let up on repression.

8. Karen

The Kayah State, home of the Karen, is sandwiched between the Shan State to the north and the Karen State to the south on Burma's eastern border with Thailand. Karen ('Red Karen') is the collective name for a dozen Karen-speaking groups; the name comes from the traditional color of the clothing of the largest sub-group, the

⁴⁰ Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 15.

⁴¹ Theodorson, *Minority Peoples*, 14.

⁴² Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 15.

⁴³ Ibid.

Kayah.⁴⁴ The majority of Karen are Christian, mostly Baptist and Catholic. In a country that is overwhelmingly Buddhist, it seems logical for the Christian minority to stay united. However, the Christians in the Kayah State have let disagreements separate them from the Baptist Karen.⁴⁵ The Burmese Government has attempted to use this divide to drive a wedge between the Christian subgroups to weaken their resolve.

The Karen have a reputation as superb fighters dating back to the seventeenth century when they attained their independence from both Thai and Burman rulers.⁴⁶ The British under colonization never annexed the then-Karen State (the government changed the name to Kayah State in 1951) and Kayah State, like most others, was granted the right to secede (after ten years) under the 1947 Burmese Constitution.

The Karen have resisted capitulating to the Burmese Government continuously since World War II. But the leading Karen opposition groups, the Karen National Progressive Party (KNPP), the left-wing Karen Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), and the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) have also suffered from in-fighting. This has helped the Burmese Government to keep the groups apart. The Kayah State, while possessing Burma's most important hydro-electric plant and valuable mineral reserves, has some of the poorest educational and health indicators of any part of the country.⁴⁷ The Karen have also suffered displacement of their population by the junta, and thousands of Karen refugees reside on the Thai side of the border with Burma.

9. Chinese and Indians

Burma is home to large Chinese and Indian populations. While not recognized by the Government of Burma as separate ethnic minorities (or ‘national races’), and though they don’t live in designated states, Burma’s resident Chinese and Indians were influential during British rule and during the rise of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). The Indian population is estimated to exceed one million and most live in

⁴⁴ Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 17.

⁴⁵ Martin Smith, *Burma Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 353.

⁴⁶ Ronald D. Renard, “The Delineation of the Kayah States Frontiers with Thailand: 1809-1894,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (1987).

⁴⁷ Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 17.

Western Burma in the Rakhine State. However, the Indian population is much smaller than it could potentially have been. In the 1930s, deliberate anti-Indian violence directed at the Indians who migrated to Burma to farm rice resulted in 500,000 Indians fleeing Burma. Following Ne Win's 1962 coup, another 300,000 returned to India.

The Chinese population in Burma is around half a million and the Chinese reside mainly in the states bordering China.⁴⁸ The Chinese have been linked to the CPB in the twentieth century and more recently, the Burmese have viewed the Chinese as rivals in business. Like the Indians, the Chinese also fled en masse following the Ne Win coup. Both the Chinese and the Indian populations in Burma continue to face discrimination under the 1982 Citizenship Law that limits “non-citizens” from education benefits, owning property, and holding public office.⁴⁹ Anti-Chinese and anti-Indian sentiment remains strong in Burma despite the strengthening of relations between Burma and both countries.

G. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Bagan, Taungoo, Konbaung Kingdoms

Burma has only been ‘unified’ at three points in its history. First, in the eleventh century, the Bagan Dynasty established centralized rule. Today, looking back this is considered the “Golden Age.”⁵⁰ It was in this time period that Theravada Buddhism made its first appearance, and the Bagan ruled from 1044 until the thirteenth century when Mongol invaders destroyed the Bagan capitol in the Irrawaddy River Delta.

In the fifteenth century, Burma was again unified, this time under the Taungoo Dynasty, which lasted until the eighteenth century when it was defeated by, the Shan. The final Burman royal dynasty, the Konbaung, was established in 1752 under the rule of King Alaungpaya and lasted until the fall of King Thibaw to the British in 1885.

⁴⁸ Martin Smith, *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change*, 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

As the Konbaung (1752-1885) expanded westward in the 1820s, eventually conquering Assam, the British East India Company reacted.⁵¹ In 1824, the armies of the Burmese king and the English East India Company fought the longest and most expensive war in British Indian history.⁵² This initial war, dubbed the First Anglo-Burman War, was followed by the Second (1852-3) and Third Anglo-Burman (1885) Wars. The third and final war began with a dispute over teak concessions, but was actually a reaction by the British to French ambitions to expand into Burma as part of their Southeast Asia colonization strategy.⁵³ The Third Anglo-Burman War ended the rule of the last Burman King Thibaw and began Britain's colonization of Burma. The lead up to British colonization was marked by rising conflict in Burma between the Burman monarchy and the minority ethnic groups.

Throughout the reign of the Konbaung, the Mon and Karen resisted their Burman rulers and aided the British during their three wars waged against the Konbaung. A formidable Shan rebellion broke out in 1883, and the Kachin invaded Upper Burma in force in 1884-1885.⁵⁴ As already mentioned, tension between the Burmans and the ethnic minorities persists to the present day.

British colonization of Burma had similarly long lasting effects which have carried over into modern Burma. When the British colonized Burma, they did so as an extension of their rule in India and governed Burma through Indian colonial administrators.

2. British Colonization

Under British rule, Burma experienced significant changes. The British rejected Burman Buddhist laws and replaced them with an administrative system that functioned under permanent lines of authority, radiating from the center to the colony's borders.⁵⁵

⁵¹ US State Department, "Burma," 1.

⁵¹ Ibid., 111-112.

⁵² Ibid., 113.

⁵³ John F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1958) 118-119.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁵ Rotberg, *Burma* 17.

The Burman monastic education system was eventually replaced by missionary and state education designed to marginalize the Buddhist monks. Along with replacing the Burman king with a foreign governor, the British set up a permanent hierarchy and brought in well-educated and trained administrators, who served throughout the land. The military and police in Burma were led by Britons, but staffed by Indians and ethnic minorities, further shifting the balance of power from the Burmans to minorities and foreigners.⁵⁶ The British furthered the divide between the Burmans and the ethnic minorities by implementing indirect rule in the hill areas.

Overall, the colonial system introduced liberal democracy to the Burmans, and Burman society moved in two general directions. The urban elites pushed for independence based on constitutional government while the rural population desired a return to traditional values from the pre-colonial period. This kept the minorities not only separated from the Burmans, but separated from each other.

3. World War II – Japanese Occupation

These latent divides came to the fore when the Japanese invaded Burma in 1942. In their original war plans, the Japanese did not intend to invade Burma, but reconsidered after they thought they could bring the war in China to a close by cutting off the Burma Road.⁵⁷ Also, Burma provided Japan with much needed raw materials to support its war effort, while Japanese used Burman agents to provide information about the status of the British defenses prior to invasion. Aung San, who avoided arrest in Burma for subversion and fled to Japan, organized from within Burma the “Thirty Comrades.” These were Burman allies who aided the Japanese in their invasion of Burma. Many of the members of the Thirty Comrades came to political prominence following the war, to include future dictator Ne Win. On December 8, 1941, the day following the Pearl

⁵⁶ Rotberg, *Burma*, 19.

⁵⁷ Cady, *The United States and Burma*, 156.

Harbor attack, the Japanese brought the Thirty Comrades to Bangkok to finalize war plans and, at this meeting, the Burma Independence Army (BIA) was officially established.⁵⁸

The Japanese routed the Chinese and British forces defending Burma who retreated into China and India. In the wake of the British retreat, the largely Burman BIA, which distinguished itself initially in battle, degenerated into an armed mob. The severity of ethnic violence it engaged in surprised even the Japanese.⁵⁹ The Karen, Karenni, and Kachin, who remained loyal to the British and fought with the allies to retake Burma, were brutalized by both the BIA and the Japanese. However, the Japanese also mistreated their Burman allies, subjecting them to forced labor to rebuild an infrastructure largely destroyed by the retreating British.⁶⁰ As a consequence, Aung San eventually turned the BIA against the Japanese and fought to expel the invaders.

In the aftermath of the fighting, with the British weakened from the war, her reassertion of control lacked the vigor they possessed prior to the war. Inter-ethnic fighting which pitted the Karen, Karenni, and Kachin against the Burmans and Shan, as well as internal fighting between the Rakhine and Rohingya, created deep scars in the collective Burmese psyche leading to the Burmese conviction that (to this day) ‘World War II continues in Burma.’⁶¹

4. United States, British, And Burmese Allies

During World War II, the United States fought both conventional and unconventional wars in Burma against the Japanese and her clients. Initially driven out of the country by the invading Japanese, General Joseph Stilwell, in charge of the China

⁵⁸ Donald M. Seekins, *Burma and Japan Since 1940: From ‘Co-Prosperity’ to ‘Quiet Dialogue’* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2007) 20.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁰ Seekins, *Burma and Japan Since 1940*, 13-14. The Japanese recruited the so-called ‘Sweat Army’ who were essentially forced laborers who worked under inhuman conditions, especially on the Thai-Burma Railway, the so-called ‘railway of death.’ Deprived of food, shelter, and medical treatment, tens of thousands died laying tracks through the fever-ridden mountainous jungle. The post-1988 military regime has also used forced labor on a large scale, including construction of a rail line between Ye and Tavoy in southern Burma, which has been called a ‘second railway of death.

⁶¹ Ibid., 27.

Burma India (CBI) Theater forces, prepared United States, British and Chinese forces to re-invade Burma and drive out the Japanese. The United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS) organized a force and deployed it to Assam to conduct sabotage behind Japanese lines in Burma. The OSS's Detachment 101 quickly transitioned from direct action sabotage missions to raising, equipping, training, and employing Kachin recruits for guerrilla warfare against the Japanese and their Burman counterparts.

The Allies eventually drove the Japanese out of Burma. Despite the bonds forged between the Americans and Kachin during the war, the U.S. was in no position to aid the Kachin in any way beyond the war as the British re-established colonial control.

5. Independence

When World War II ended, the British sought to rebuild the economy of Burma while taking steps to advance Burma to full membership in the British Commonwealth.⁶² The British realized independence was inevitable, but felt the Burmese were not ready to govern themselves politically, socially, or economically. Aung San, who helped build up the BNA, which was the foundation of the modern Burmese military (the *Tatmadaw*) became Burma's wartime leader and emerged from the war as the de facto leader of the Burmese. Despite emphatic warnings from Winston Churchill and others about the reckless nature of the colony's drive toward freedom, the British government seemed ready to work with Aung San and his party, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL).⁶³

Prior to the war, the British governed the Irrawaddy Delta Region separately from the hill areas. At the time, the British did not believe the ethnic minorities were politically ready to integrate with the Burmans. After World War II, the Karen expected the British to grant them independence due to their unwavering support and historic enmity toward

⁶² Josef Silverstein, "Civil War and Rebellion in Burma," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (1990): 115.

⁶³ Matthew J. Walton, "Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong," *Asian Survey* (2008) 895.

the Burmans. The British advocated that no decision on independence would be made without the consent of the people from the Frontier Area. Aung San echoed this view and supported autonomy for the hill people.

In January 1947, Aung San and the leaders of the AFPFL were called to London where they entered into an agreement with the British government outlining the steps to be taken to achieve independence.⁶⁴ Upon his return to Burma, Aung San held a conference at Panglong with Shan, Kachin, and Chin representatives to discuss terms of a future union with independent Burma. The ethnic representatives and Aung San all agreed to work together for independence, Aung San promised the minorities that they could participate in the interim government he was heading, and he told them that they would enjoy equality and autonomy.⁶⁵ Aung San never lived to see the agreement come to fruition, however; he was assassinated in July 1947 by a rival political opponent. The agreement at Panglong is significant because of the autonomy and equality spelled out for the ethnic minorities, which is still claimed by the minority groups today as owed to them by the government.

Unfortunately, the 1947 constitution produced a flawed union of the minorities with the Burman majority. The constitution granted two ethnic groups, the Shan and Karen, the right to secede after 10 years while the other ethnic groups were not afforded this opportunity. Also significant in the constitution were statements that all states were dependent on the central government and the Prime Minister had the right to name the head of state of the minority states.⁶⁶ The inequities in the constitution received immediate response from the minority states, with the Karen refusing the state given to them. To compensate for the inequalities, the AFPFL chose a Shan for the country's first president and allowed a Karen to head the army.⁶⁷

Prior to World War II, the communists in Burma had begun to gather strength and they aligned themselves with Aung San, the AFPFL, and the army to fight off the

⁶⁴ Silverstein, “Civil War and Rebellion in Burma,” 115-116.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Japanese. However, Aung San expelled the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) from Burma prior to the signing of the constitution and the CPB rebelled.

Thus, when Burma became an independent nation in January 1948, it had incompletely defined states, dissatisfaction over the inequality of the states, a minority preparing to defend its people against the Burman majority and a communist party preparing for revolution.⁶⁸

The modern nation of Burma became independent on January 4, 1948 at 4:20 AM with the specific time chosen by Burmese astrologers as the most propitious for the country's new beginning.⁶⁹ The AFPFL took power with U Nu accepting duties as the country's first prime minister.

6. Burma's Initial Independent Government

The Burmese entered independence with high expectations for freedom and prosperity. However, Burma's leaders faced enormous challenges. Burma lacked trained civil administrators because the British employed foreign civil servants – Indians mostly - to run the country during the colonial period. The communists, formerly part of the AFPFL had broken away, gone underground, and were attempting to mobilize support of the population for land reform. The armed People's Volunteer Organization (PVO) which had been set up by Aung San for World War II veterans, also turned into an insurgent group.⁷⁰ In the face of these threats, the Tatmadaw was weakened by defections; first, by all-Burman units to the CPB and second, by all-Karen units to the Karen.⁷¹

In response, General Ne Win, a Burman and one of the Thirty Comrades, replaced the Karen commander of the Tatmadaw and reorganized the army by placing Burman officers in charge of all of the Tatmadaw's units. Ne Win began to build up the Tatmadaw and subsequently drove the insurrectionists out of the Irrawaddy Plain, relying on harsh tactics and martial law to subdue his opponents. After Mao's takeover of China

⁶⁸ Silverstein, "Civil War and Rebellion in Burma," 116.

⁶⁹ Fink, *Living Silence*, 23.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁷¹ Silverstein, "Civil War and Rebellion in Burma," 117.

in 1949, the Tatmadaw also had to contend with communist Chinese troops as well as the nationalist Chinese Kuomintang (covertly sponsored by the United States) that had fled from the Red Army into northern Burma. The Tatmadaw entered the Shan State to expel the Kuomintang, but in doing so mistreated the local Shan population stirring further resentment towards the Burman-dominated army and government.

In an effort to lift all portions of Burmese society, the Government of Burma launched social programs in the 1950's to provide free public education and also implemented land reform to redistribute land which had been occupied by foreigners and absentee landlords.⁷² However, the government's good intentions fell short upon implementation and many of its socialist goals went unfulfilled. U Nu further alienated certain ethnic minorities when he brought Buddhism to the fore of his political agenda.

As 1958 approached, the Shan and Karen looked to exercise their constitutional right to secede from Burma. Military officers voiced their dissatisfaction with these potential secessions, and in response in 1958, U Nu announced that Senior General Ne Win would form a caretaker government.⁷³ Ne Win's caretaker government offered a glimpse of the future for Burma. Squatter communities had sprung up in the capital of Rangoon, causing disruption to daily life and unsanitary conditions. Ne Win on short notice moved the squatters to satellite towns that were unprepared for the influx of transients. The caretaker government responded negatively to criticism by the press and imprisoned journalists for challenging its policies. Ne Win extended the caretaker government twice beyond its original six-month charter expired, but finally acquiesced to pressure for national elections which were held in 1960.

7. Ne Win's Coup

Approaching the elections, U Nu's Buddhist leanings made him a popular candidate among the majority Buddhist population, and his Union Party, (reorganized from the AFPFL) won a landslide victory. Immediately, U Nu came under fire from

⁷² Fink, *Living Silence*, 24.

⁷³ Ibid, 27. U Nu publicly stated that he voluntarily invited Ne Win to establish a caretaker government but it became clear later that he had little choice in the matter. At the time, rumors were spreading that military officers were plotting a coup.

minority groups for their perceived neglect by his government. When U Nu pushed through a constitutional amendment making Buddhism the national religion of Burma, minority groups again began a push for secession.⁷⁴ In March of 1962, during a high-level seminar attended by U Nu and senior Shan representatives concerning federal issues, Ne Win again seized power and arrested U Nu, members of his government, and many Shan leaders.⁷⁵

Several different reasons are offered for Ne Win's coup: that Ne Win and the Tatmadaw wanted to return to the position of power they experienced as the caretaker government in 1958; concern that U Nu's sympathy for the ethnic minorities was eroding the Union of Burma; or perhaps, most compelling, that U Nu and the ethnic minorities were increasingly critical of the Tatmadaw and their heavy-handed ways of dealing with the insurgents and minority groups.⁷⁶ What was clearly evident at the time of the 1962 coup was that the Tatmadaw, built up from the original BIA, was a well organized formidable force, loyal to Ne Win. It planned and executed a coup throughout the country with no question about who was in control.

8. Ne Win's Government

Ne Win's first priority after re-taking office was to establish control over the country. Shortly after the beginning of the new school year in June 1962, student protests began (at the University of Rangoon) in reaction to a revised school policy that called for dismissing any student who failed an exam three consecutive times. The protests turned into riots, and when police could not stop the student violence, Ne Win sent in the army, which ended the riots by firing into the crowd, killing scores of students and wounding hundreds more. When students continued to protest by posting placards on the walls of the student union with insults leveled at Ne Win and his estranged wife, the general authorized the building's total destruction.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Rotberg, *Burma* 37.

⁷⁵ Fink, *Living Silence* 29.

⁷⁶ Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 202-203.

⁷⁷ Cady, *The United States and Burma*, 240.

Ne Win and his Revolutionary Council of advisors set out to reform Burmese politics and society. They started by replacing approximately 2,000 civilian members of the country's administration with military personnel.⁷⁸ The Revolutionary Council instituted what it called 'the Burmese Way to Socialism,' a program to socialize the country and distribute wealth across the nation.⁷⁹ The Revolutionary Council nationalized banks, industries, and large shops. Burmese currency (50-kyat and 100-kyat notes) was demonetized with the intention of depriving foreign capitalists of wealth, which drove thousands of Indians and Chinese out of the country when they lost everything.⁸⁰ Ne Win's policies began a state of Burmese isolationism that continues today.

Ne Win's socialist policies were a disaster for Burma. When the Revolutionary Council redistributed land to landless farmers and then forced them to sell their rice to the government at far below market prices, the farmers put little effort into cultivating rice for the state and many turned to the black market instead. As military men were brought in to take over businesses and industries, the enterprises suffered greatly and many educated and trained civilians fled the country in search of better opportunities. Burma, which in the 1930s was the leading exporter of rice in the world, became a rice importer under Ne Win's regime.

Under Ne Win's reign, only one political party was recognized: the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). This was a party founded by Ne Win and its focus was to further implement socialist policies under the tight control of the military. The regime kept tight control on the Burman population, while focusing the military on counterinsurgency operations against ethnic minority rebels and communist insurgents alike. The Tatmadaw counterinsurgency operations were aided by the fact that the ethnic minorities fought as individual forces and did not consolidate their efforts.

In 1976, a new phase in the civil war began when eight minority groups led by the Karen, Bo Mya, joined together to form the National Democratic Front (NDF) made up

⁷⁸ Fink, *Living Silence*, 32.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

of Karen, Arakanese, Kachin, Karenni, Lahus, Palaungs, Shan, and Pa-Os.⁸¹ The goal of the organization was to unite the military forces of the ethnic groups to collectively fight the Tatmadaw. The NDF, however, did not initially have any precise political goals and did not integrate the communists into the organization, which weakened its military capability. Although the NDF failed to achieve its military objectives, the groups did come to an agreement to work toward a future federation based on equality, autonomy, liberty, and self-determination.⁸²

9. Ne Win Steps Down

Ne Win's socialism, which was a mask for his authoritarianism, drove the economy and standard of living well below what it had been at the beginning of his reign. The xenophobia and isolationism characteristic of the BSPP and the Revolutionary Council are his other enduring legacy; they remain intact in Burma's dealings with Western powers today. With the economy in a shambles, the Burmese dictator officially called a special meeting of the BSPP on July 23, 1988, where he outlined an initiative for a multi-party system in Burma, and he announced his resignation as party leader.⁸³ In his final speech as leader of the BSPP, Ne Win called for an end to socialism in Burma and advocated allowing private business and industry to return.

Ne Win's proposal was rejected by the BSSP, but his resignation was accepted and, three days later, the party chose Sein Lwin as its leader and the new head of state.⁸⁴ Sein Lwin, known as "the Butcher," served under Ne Win in World War II and, despite very little education, rose to the top of the BSPP mainly through his ruthlessness and willingness to use extreme force to put down protests and resistance.

⁸¹ Silverstein, "Civil War and Rebellion in Burma," 118.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, 124.

⁸⁴ Fink, *Living Silence*, 54.

10. National Democracy Movement and the Rise of the SLORC

Soon after Sein Lwin's installment, protests began nationwide on August 8, 1988.⁸⁵ Despite Ne Win's warnings against using the Tatmadaw to violently put down the protests, Sein Lwin instituted martial law and ordered the army to fire on crowds in Rangoon and Mandalay. The protesters ranged from dockworkers to university students to monks, and the protests occurred simultaneously across the country, not only in the large cities, but in small villages and even in the minority states. Surprisingly, Sein Lwin resigned on August 12 and his successor, Dr. Maung Maung, called for an end to martial law and the release of all political prisoners.

At the same time, U Nu began a push to reclaim his position as the country's prime minister, a new and influential opposition leader appeared. Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of General Aung San called for moderation and the peaceful transfer of power.⁸⁶ The BSPP announced it would allow a multi-party parliament and hold a national election. But the protestors were leery of the BSPP's promise and the protests continued.

On September 18, 1988, the military staged a coup and seized power from the BSPP. The Tatmadaw began dismantling the protestors' barricades and anyone who resisted was shot. The new ruling military junta called itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and its new chairman was General Saw Maung (although many believed Ne Win was in control of the SLORC behind the scenes).⁸⁷ Evidence that the protests did have an impact on the new ruling junta can be seen in its 1989 announcement that elections would be held in May 1990; ideally that would buy enough time for the SLORC to influence the elections in its favor.

Political parties sprang up all over Burma, but the most significant was the National League for Democracy (NLD) with Aung San Suu Kyi as its leader. The government began a smear campaign to discredit Aung San Suu Kyi, highlighting her marriage to an Englishman to play on Burmese xenophobia. As the daughter of Burma's

⁸⁵ 8/8/88 is a date in Burma which commemorates the protests similar to the "9/11" date reference for the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001.

⁸⁶ Silverstein, "Civil War and Rebellion in Burma," 125.

⁸⁷ Fink, *Living Silence*, 62.

national hero, her popularity remained high. The SLORC placed her under house arrest prior to the elections. The elections were held and the NLD won 392 of 485 parliamentary votes while the military-backed National Unity Party (NUP) won only 10 seats.⁸⁸ The SLORC employed delaying tactics after the election and attempted to delegitimize the results.⁸⁹

11. SLORC Policies

By separating itself from the BSPP, the military leaders of the SLORC believed the country would respond more favorably to a new regime which attempted to instill pride in being Burmese. The junta renamed the country Myanmar and changed the capital name from Rangoon to Yangon (the names Burma and Rangoon are colonial transliterations).⁹⁰ However, the SLORC also claimed that the CPB had infiltrated the NLD and thereby refused to cede power and honor the election results.⁹¹ Senior General Saw Maung declared martial law and all gatherings of three or more persons were deemed illegal. The SLORC prioritized internal security and embarked on reorganizing and expanding the army, while welfare, health, and educational facilities were established that catered directly to the military.⁹² The junta delegated power down to the Tatmadaw's regional commanders who were given political authority over their regions.

After the 1990 elections, the junta prioritized negotiating ceasefires with the ethnic minorities, and over the next several years, seventeen of the twenty-one major anti-government forces (with as many as fifty thousand troops) concluded cease-fire agreements with the SLORC.⁹³ In 1995, after six years of house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi was released. Analysts believe the SLORC released her to improve relations with

⁸⁸ Fink, *Living Silence*, 69.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 72.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 70.

⁹¹ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 365.

⁹² Callahan, *Making Enemies*, 211.

⁹³ Ibid., 215.

the Japanese in order to resume full-scale development aid, something that had been promised if the regime restored political and economic openness in Burma.⁹⁴

12. SPDC Assumes Power

As the SLORC tried to improve the Burmese economy, double-digit inflation eroded the value of the population's wealth and, in 1997, the Asian economic crisis brought a halt to much of the foreign investment in Burma. To create a new and milder image, the ruling junta renamed the SLORC the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in November 1997. But despite the new name, it was business as usual. The SPDC focused on destroying the NLD by using party members to intimidate NLD members and their families, and incarcerating those who refused to resign.⁹⁵ The SPDC has also relied on Than Shwe's Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) formed in 1993. Officially boasting over 20 million members, the USDA defends the interests of the regime by maintaining government control at the local level.⁹⁶

Despite coming to ceasefire terms with many of the ethnic minority groups, the SLORC/SPDC has persisted in using harsh counterinsurgency tactics such as mass relocations of civilians and aggressive intelligence operations. The investment in the Tatmadaw has resulted in a trained and effective force which is skilled at marginalizing the insurgents. The SPDC remains at odds with the United States and the European Union, but in the past decade has successfully courted its neighbors—China, India, and Thailand—to draw investment to Burma to exploit its untapped natural resources.

H. CONCLUSION

The SLORC /SPDC have been effective in the last twenty years in maintaining power despite mass demonstrations, one of the poorest economies in the world, ongoing insurgencies, and pressure from the international community to reform. The SPDC continues to use human trafficking and human rights abuses to control and exploit the

⁹⁴ Fink, *Living Silence*, 86.

⁹⁵ Fink, *Living Silence*, 94.

⁹⁶ Morton Pedersen, *Promoting Human Rights in Burma: A Critique of Western Sanctions Policy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2008).156-157.

population and the junta benefits economically from drug trafficking. As evidenced by Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the regime is not willing to open up to the West and the violent reaction to the Saffron Revolution in 2007 shows the junta has not changed its approach to its opposition and is willing to take on any group, to include Buddhist monks, to retain power. The following chapters will further explore the issues of the regime's counterinsurgency methodology and its use of sovereignty as we examine what options might be available to the United States to affect change in Burma.

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III. COUNTERINSURGENCY

Today our armed forces are engaged not only in the task of defending the state, but as part of their historical duty, are performing other duties in the political, economic, and social sectors. Since we have been given, through circumstance, the opportunity of shouldering the responsibilities of State at this time, we have pledged with pure good will to make every endeavor to build a modern developed nation where peace prevails.⁹⁷

Senior General Than Shwe

A. INTRODUCTION

Insurgency in ‘independent’ Burma has been ongoing since British colonialism ended in 1948. Even prior to independence, Burmese factions were rebelling against or resisting the British and the Japanese. Since the 1962 coup, the governments of Burma have waged ‘successful,’ although lengthy and incomplete, counterinsurgency campaigns. The current government under Than Shwe remains firmly in power with no imminent internal or external threat to its rule. However, the government exists in a state of enforced stability. In other words, without the SLORC/SPDC’s and the Tatmadaw’s violent repression, the country could potentially lapse into factional fighting between ethnic groups or fall into civil war.

Since independence, Burmese governments have negated insurgent threats from multiple internal ethnic minority insurgent groups, a faction of the Kuomintang (KMT) following defeat by Mao’s Red Army, and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) backed by the People’s Republic of China. The current regime has also successfully crushed national democracy movements, most notably that by the National League for Democracy (NLD) originating with student and worker protests. More recently, the junta stamped out the uprising led by Buddhist monks known as the ‘Saffron Revolution.’ What is particularly notable is that Burma’s regimes have quelled these rebellions in a part of the world where communist revolts have led to government overthrows in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

⁹⁷ Pedersen, *Promoting Human Rights in Burma*, 79.

B. INTERNAL SECURITY – THE REGIME’S PRIORITY

A long and continuous history of rebellion in Burma has made the ruling junta prioritize security above all else. In quoting from an official Burmese government publication Morten Pedersen reports:

The Burmese government’s stance is “security is the most basic and most important requirement of the country … A nation without security is incapable of doing anything, Economic activities are impossible. Social welfare is jeopardized. Governments as well as the people must first ensure security to enable them to pursue their objectives.”⁹⁸

The stated core values of the Burmese government are reflected in the three main national causes of national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national solidarity.⁹⁹ National sovereignty has been an idea embraced by military rulers ever since Ne Win took control in 1962. Burma’s generals recall the ‘golden age’ of Burman dominance of the Bagan, Taungoo, and Konbaung dynasties and live by the notion that the country will not fall under the influence of a foreign power again. Sovereignty is interpreted to not only mean keeping foreign influence out of the country, but to maintaining dominant internal control. Territorial integrity, as related to control of the ethnic border areas, has been elusive for the Burmese government to achieve in light of insurgencies ongoing for almost half a century. The ruling junta’s counterinsurgency efforts have emphasized wresting control of the border areas away from the ethnic rebels. Finally, national solidarity has been a strategic objective of the Burman dominated central government since the SLORC took control in 1988. The idea of a federalist Burma has been rejected by the military governments since the end of democratic rule in Burma. With these as its guiding strategies, the ruling regimes have adopted counterinsurgency approaches that have been effective, brutal, manipulative, and enduring.

⁹⁸ Pedersen, *Promoting Human Rights in Burma*, 82.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

C. COUNTERINSURGENCY – DEMOCRACY VERSUS AUTHORITARIAN RULE

The U.S. military, since the September 11, 2001, attacks and subsequent Afghanistan and Iraq invasions, has devoted a great deal of energy to the study of counterinsurgency from a democracy's perspective. While in theory the counterinsurgency objectives of a democracy and an authoritarian regime can be said to be similar - namely, to win the support of the population—their approaches differ. The democracy faces greater constraints in its application of counterinsurgency methods than the authoritarian regime thanks to its adherence to domestic and international laws and sensitivity to public opinion. The duration of the counterinsurgency, resources devoted, and manpower applied are tightly scrutinized by voters, creating pressure for a rapid and decisive resolution to conflict. Ironically, here is where an authoritarian regime exhibits much more freedom—exemplified by Burma's counterinsurgency campaigns that have spanned more than half a century.

It is widely accepted in counterinsurgency theory that the aim is to win the support of the population. The population provides the resources, support and, security for the insurgents. As is often said, win over the population, or achieve its corollary - deny access to the population for the insurgents and you can defeat the insurgents. The recent Western approach has been to gain the support of the population for the government, based on beefing up the government's legitimacy. While defeating the insurgency militarily is treated as a top priority, gaining the support of the population is deemed a higher priority, with implications for helping guarantee long-term stability of the country. David Galula captures this argument in his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare*:

If the insurgent manages to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically, to get its active support, he will win the war because, in the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population or, at worst, on its submissiveness. Thus the battle for the population is a major characteristic of the revolutionary war.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ David Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964) 7-8.

D. INSURGENCY IN BURMA

Burma's experiences with insurgencies have been shaped by its geography, ethnicity, and history. There is little doubt that the longevity of Burma's ongoing insurgencies is due in large part to their locations in areas inaccessible to the Tatmadaw. Burma's mountainous peripheral areas and porous borders have provided physical sanctuary for decades for the ethnic minority insurgents, and help to explain why the Burmese government has not decisively defeated the rebellions. Physical isolation is also a partial reason why the various ethnic groups have never successfully united to collectively fight the Burman-dominated Tatmadaw and government. Ethnic autonomy is the driving force behind the struggle for each separate group. A century ago, under colonialism, the British furthered the distinction between ethnic groups through their "divide and rule" policy. The policy kept the Burman majority out of the military while the British Burmese military was populated with foreign troops (mainly Indian) and ethnic minorities (predominantly Karen, with large factions of Karenni and Kachin). British favoritism caused deep-seated resentment among the Burmans which surfaced during the Japanese occupation in WWII. While the Burmans and BIA under Aung San eventually turned against the Japanese in 1945, the brutal fighting and atrocities committed by the Burmans/Shan against the Karen, Kachin, and Karenni caused greater hatred between the ethnic groups.

By the end of WWII, the seeds of insurgency had been sown and, at independence, the seeds of rebellion began to germinate. On WWII's conclusion, with the end of British colonialism imminent, hope for a united Burma faded with the assassination of Aung San. Promises for autonomy made at the Panglong Conference resurfaced when Ne Win took power in the face of breakaway movements by the ethnic minorities. The Karen, who looked to the British to grant them autonomy, quickly rebelled when they realized the new independent government had no intention of granting them autonomy. Ne Win, one of the 'Thirty Comrades,' who was trained by the Japanese in WWII, adopted many of the Kempeitai's counterinsurgency practices which were later further refined by the SLORC/SPDC.

At independence, the Burman National Army (BNA) was a weak force and a large cause of concern for the U Nu government in light of the numerous threats the government faced. Ne Win, then head of the military, saw the inherent danger of having a weak military, and immediately set out to strengthen the BNA. The armed forces grew from 2,000 at independence to 100,000 when Ne Win secured power in 1962.¹⁰¹ The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and the KMT created huge challenges for the Ne Win government and the Tatmadaw. The CPB, backed by the PRC, was able to generate some support among the ethnic groups, but even with good leadership and ample amounts of arms, the CPB was not able to topple the government and the Tatmadaw kept the communists off balance until the CPB collapsed in 1989. Probably the biggest reason the CPB was not able to establish a base in the Irrawaddy Plains is because communism did not gain popular support among the ethnic Burmans.

The KMT in the 1950s was also well armed and became influential in the drug trade operating out of the Shan State. The KMT initially threatened the U Nu government, but was ultimately defeated by the Tatmadaw. The KMT originally enjoyed U.S. support because of its anti-communist stance, but in a brokered agreement was eventually forced to retreat to Taiwan to rejoin Chiang Kai-shek and the main KMT force.

The Karen insurgency initially was successful in pushing to Insein on the outskirts of Rangoon. However, the Karen eventually lost their foothold and were pushed back into the Karen State. Following his 1962 coup, Ne Win held a “Peace Parley” in 1963-64 with representatives of the larger minority groups and a representative from the CPB.¹⁰² Martin Smith describes the parley:

During these rare face-to-face meetings, none of the ethnic insurgent parties demanded actual secession, although they continued to claim the conceptual right. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), for example, called for an independent Kachin state with the rights of secession and self-determinations; the Communist Party of Arakan (CPA) wanted a ‘Republic of Arakan’ with the right of secession; and the Shan groups called for a federal system of states. But ethnic delegates later

¹⁰¹ Martin Smith “Ethnic Conflicts in Burma” in *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, 293-321 (Northhampton: Edward Elgar, 2007) 302.

¹⁰² Ibid., 305.

complained that, during the talks, Tatmadaw officers only ever really called on their groups to surrender. Ne Win, especially, was concerned that formal ceasefires could lead to partition of Burma, as had happened in Korea and Vietnam.¹⁰³

Following the Peace Parley, the Tatmadaw embarked on almost continuous counterinsurgency operations for the next 25 years. Modeled on the British ‘new village’ tactics in Malaysia and the U.S. ‘strategic hamlet’ operations in Vietnam, Ne Win implemented a policy called “Four Cuts” which was intended to cut all links to food, funds, intelligence, and recruits between local villagers and insurgent forces.¹⁰⁴ Some believe Four Cuts to be a derivation of the Japanese army’s *sanko seisaku* or ‘three all’ policy in China (‘kill all; burn all; destroy all’).¹⁰⁵ Because they were authoritarian military governments, neither the Ne Win regime and nor the subsequent SLORC/SPDC juntas were compelled to adopt a ‘hearts and mind’ approach to sway the population.

E. COUNTERINSURGENCY IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

One advantage an authoritarian regime has over a democracy in counterinsurgency operations is more leeway in how it can influence the population. For instance, destruction or forced relocation of a population sympathetic to the insurgents effectively eliminates insurgent movements. This is a technique employed at least since Roman times. Another example of a policy used often in the past, exemplified by the British in the Boer War, is a scorched earth policy resulting in removal of insurgent sustenance through the destruction of property, killing of livestock, and burning of crops.¹⁰⁶ Although such extreme measures might seem to be unacceptable in the modern world, recent examples of brutal counterinsurgency practices have occurred throughout the world in the last half-century without actions being taken against the offending government. Sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States against

¹⁰³Martin Smith, “Ethnic Conflicts in Burma.” 305.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Seekins, *Burma and Japan Since 1940*, 23.

¹⁰⁶Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 39.

Burma for government repression of its people have been systematically rejected by the ruling junta which accuses the EU and U.S. of having themselves employed these same harsh practices in the past.

The Spanish, French, Dutch, and British, for instance, resorted to extreme violence in quelling uprisings within their colonies, while the U.S. government forced relocation of Indian tribes from their ancestral lands to reservations. The Chinese crushed rebellions in Tibet in 1956 and 1959 with great violence, orchestrating mass killings, the deportation of tens of thousands, and the admission of children to re-education centers.¹⁰⁷ Harsh repression of the Tibetans by the Chinese continues today. The Indonesians took control of East Timor in 1976 and, in the process of consolidating power, killed 30 percent of the East Timorese population with napalm bombing and starvation.¹⁰⁸ The remainder were herded into huge camps with no access to food and then resettled in new villages easily controlled by the Indonesian military.¹⁰⁹ Saddam Hussein used forced relocations, conventional military attacks, and even chemical weapons to subdue the Kurds.

F. BURMESE COUNTERINSURGENCY THROUGH COERCION

Key to the Burmese governments' ability to maintain power for fifty years has been their capacity to escalate the level of violence and brutality in response to resistance, combined with their capacity to co-opt insurgents. Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf describe insurgent movements as systems, with inputs to the system obtained mostly from the internal environment (what they call endogeny) and from external actors (which they call exogeny).¹¹⁰ According to Leites and Wolf, the insurgents rely on a "mix" between endogeny and exogeny, and for inputs from the local environment, they rely on both persuasion and coercion.¹¹¹ Stealing a page from the insurgent playbook, the

¹⁰⁷ Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 37.

¹⁰⁸ Jose Ramos-Horta, "Casualties of Silence: East Timor's Struggle for Self-Determination," *Harvard International Review* (1997).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf Jr. "Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts." *Rand Corporation* (1970): 32-33.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 33.

Burmese military rulers have denied inputs from the local environment by removing those providing the inputs from the areas where insurgents find support. Typically, authoritarian leaders, in this case the Burmese military rulers, use both coercion and persuasion to cut off inputs to the insurgents. Democracies, in contrast, find themselves much more restricted in their use of coercion.

One of the most effective coercive strategies employed by the Burmese military regimes has been forced relocation of ethnic minorities suspected of supporting insurgents in border areas. Used widely in Burma by the Japanese in WWII against the Karen, Kachin, and Karenni, Ne Win saw the effectiveness of this strategy and applied it against resistant ethnic minorities throughout the country. Following the 1963 peace parley, ethnic and communist insurgents engaged the Tatmadaw in the remote and mountainous border areas, particularly in the northeast part of the country along the Chinese border (e.g., Kachin and Shan States). Simultaneous insurgent military offensives spread the Tatmadaw thin and Ne Win found himself forced to cede large portions of the border areas to insurgent control. While Ne Win established a security cordon around the cities in the Irrawaddy plain, he then unleashed the ‘Four Cuts’ policy against the insurgents.¹¹² Burma was divided into maps resembling a chessboard, with military districts shaded one of three colors: black for entirely insurgent-controlled areas; brown for areas both sides still disputed; and white for ‘insurgent free’ zones/districts.¹¹³

Once areas had been color-coded, Tatmadaw units moved in and ordered the villagers in brown districts to move to new villages near army bases. The villagers were told that anyone who did not comply would be considered an insurgent and shot. The Tatmadaw then returned to their villages to confiscate food, destroy crops, burn houses, and shoot any remaining villagers. Often villagers were forced into service as porters for the army, and children were conscripted. The Tatmadaw’s tactics proved devastatingly successful, and only when the operations ran up against the borders of Burma’s neighbors

¹¹² Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 259.

¹¹³ Ibid.

(Bangladesh, India, China, and Thailand) did ‘Four Cuts’ prove insufficient as insurgents used cross-border sanctuaries for resupply and protection.¹¹⁴

The Karen, who had occupied areas close to Rangoon during the U Nu era, were the first targets of this approach. The Karen were pushed out of their villages toward the Thai border where many refugees settled just inside Thailand. The Kachin and Shan were also forcibly moved by the tens of thousands.¹¹⁵

The SLORC/SPDC adopted ‘Four Cuts’ and used it as ruthlessly as had Ne Win. The SLORC/SPDC, however, added several new variants. In Rakhine State, for instance, the SLORC created ‘model villages’ made to intentionally target Muslim Rohingya. Rakhine Buddhists and other non-Rohingya were relocated to majority Rohingya villages where they were given land confiscated from the Muslims.¹¹⁶ Rohingya who had thus been separated from their land were then forced to work for their new Buddhist landlords. The intention of this ‘model village’ program was to undermine the Rohingya power base and use the Rakhine Buddhists to monitor the Muslims, which doubled as a further control measure.¹¹⁷

G. SLORC/SPDC’S NEW STRATEGY

While the SLORC/SPDC have used coercion to maintain control along Burma’s borders, in the aftermath of the democracy movement of 1988 as the SLORC/SPDC had to adopt a new counterinsurgency methodology in the form of persuasion. Faced with threats from ethnic minority insurgents *and* the Burman democracy movement, the ruling junta feared the possibility that the insurgents and pro-democracy organizers would unite against it. Consequently, the junta greatly expanded the military from 1988 to 1996, with the Tatmadaw growing from 186,000 to 370,000 soldiers.¹¹⁸ The military rulers also spent \$1 billion on 140 new combat aircraft, 30 naval vessels, 170 tanks, 250 armored

¹¹⁴ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 261.

¹¹⁵ Callahan, *Making Enemies*, 210. Over the four decades that ‘Four Cuts’ has been applied, as many as 500,000 ethnic minorities are estimated to have been killed.

¹¹⁶ Serajul Islam, “State Terrorism in Arakan,” 334.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 335.

¹¹⁸ Callahan, *Making Enemies*, 211.

personnel carriers, as well as rocket launch systems, anti-aircraft artillery, infantry weapons, and telecommunications surveillance equipment.¹¹⁹

While strengthening its posture militarily, the government strove to compel local communities to press insurgent groups to seek ceasefires by offering local leaders political and economic incentives.¹²⁰ According to Martin Smith:

As the 1990s drew on, the very existence of such co-operative schemes involving former battlefield foes decisively changed the military and political balance in much of the country...Scant resources could be conserved and troops redeployed to more troubled regions of the country. Moreover, by vigorously entering the economic field, the Tatmadaw was to have far more success in seizing the local initiative from armed opposition groups than it ever had in 26 years of fighting.¹²¹

Seventeen ethnic groups accepted ceasefires, beginning with CPB breakup in 1989, when the government offered agreements to CPB subgroups to dissuade them from joining the National Democratic Front (NDF).

As part of the ceasefire agreements, the government imposed a no-contact policy between groups. This was in keeping with the junta's 'divide and conquer' strategy.¹²² The agreements also granted the government and the military access into the ethnic minority areas, which the junta quickly took advantage of by constructing roads into the heart of the insurgent border areas. These new roads, in turn, gave the government greater access to more remote areas and gave the Tatmadaw more control over the ethnic minority populations at a relatively cheap price. Overall, these ceasefires helped remove the government's primary threats: an effective alliance among the insurgent ethnic armies; and second, the more threatening possibility, a union between the ethnic minority armies and the majority Burman opposition.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Callahan, *Making Enemies*, 211.

¹²⁰ Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict, Beyond Greed & Grievance* (Boulder, Lynne Reimer Publishers Inc. 2003) 230.

¹²¹ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 441.

¹²² Ballentine and Sherman, *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict*, 232.

¹²³ Ibid.

H. RESOURCE CONTROL

In the border areas, ethnic insurgents were able to control illicit economic activity in ‘lootable’ resources traded on Burma’s black market.¹²⁴ This became especially significant after the economy spiraled downward during Ne Win’s socialist ‘experiment.’ Control of these resources was critical to funding the insurgencies. Black market taxes were applied to: gems, minerals, and timber in the Kachin and Karenni States; teak and cattle in the Karen State; and narcotics in the Shan State.¹²⁵ Michael L. Ross hypothesizes that the more ‘lootable’ a resource is, the more it benefits a rebel group, while the more ‘unlootable’ a resource is the more it benefits the government. Such was the case in Burma until the ceasefires, when trade in ‘lootable’ resources across previously uncontrolled borders, was essentially ‘legalized’ by the Burmese government. With Tatmadaw access to the borders, the junta was able to reap the benefit of taxes on ‘lootable’ resources as they transited the country. The SLORC/SPDC sometimes used ‘tax’ concessions of this sort to co-opt insurgent leaders and ensure that they honored the ceasefires.

In the 1990s, when these ceasefires were brokered, Burma was the world’s leading opium cultivator. The majority of the narcotics trade originated from the Shan State and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) emerged from the ceasefires as the leading narcotics producer in Burma. By gaining access to the border areas of the Shan State the Burmese government was able to derive profits from opium. However, in 1999, the SPDC announced a 15-year plan to rid Burma of drugs by 2014; the announcement was in line with ASEAN’s program to rid Southeast Asia of drugs by 2015.¹²⁶ Burma’s announcement was viewed with skepticism internationally, but the opium trade has been

¹²⁴Ballentine and Sherman, 47-48. ‘Lootable’ resources are defined by Michael L. Ross as resources that can be easily appropriated by individuals or small groups of unskilled workers such as diamonds or drugs versus ‘unlootable’ resources, like oil, natural gas, or deep-shaft minerals which require capital investment and skilled labor to extract.

¹²⁵Ibid., 233.

¹²⁶U.S. Department of State Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume I - Drug and Chemical Control* (Washington D.C.: CPO 2009), 172.

reduced significantly since the 1990s. Burma dropped to second in the world in opium production next to Afghanistan (the source of 93% of the world's opium today).¹²⁷

At the same time, however, production of methamphetamines in Burma has skyrocketed, originating again from the UWSA in the Shan State. The area in Southeast Asia, along the Burmese, Thai, and Laotian borders known as the 'Golden Triangle,' has shifted to methamphetamine production and is now known as the 'Ice Triangle.' While the SPDC has taken some measures to reduce methamphetamines and has even cooperated with the U.S. and its neighbors to reduce trafficking, it is widely believed that the government is indirectly profiting.¹²⁸ Army officers who operate on the border are believed to directly profit from the trade and Burma, which ranked 178 of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perception Index, is believed to be laundering drug money and funneling the profits into businesses which benefit the junta.¹²⁹ Burma, is not only under pressure from the U.S., EU, and the United Nations to eliminate its drug activity, but Burma's immediate neighbors China, India, and Thailand, are applying what is likely to be even more persuasive pressure. These border countries have been experiencing the disruptive effects of narcotics violence, corruption, and abuse in their own populations, as well as a vast surge in HIV infection rates. Even so, in terms of its own counterinsurgency strategy, Burma's policies toward drugs can be considered a success since it has largely neutralized the drug trade as a source of funds for insurgents who, ironically, used their drug profits to buy weapons smuggled across these same borders.

I. INTELLIGENCE IN BURMA

Burma's counterinsurgency campaigns since independence have relied heavily on Burma's intelligence services, which have had the challenge of attaining an information advantage over the multiple insurgencies. Perhaps more importantly in authoritarian

¹²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume I*, 107.

¹²⁸ U.S. Department of State Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume II – Money Laundering and Financial Crimes* (Washington D.C.: CPO 2009), 146.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Burma, the intelligence services have served as a check on dissidents who belong to the Burman ethnic majority, as well as on the military itself. The intelligence services in Burma have expanded greatly in members and numbers since their formation in 1948. Then the Military Intelligence Services (MIS) consisted of only three sections for the entire country.¹³⁰ Ne Win, as head of the Tatmadaw, rapidly expanded the size of the MIS in response to the Karen, KMT, and CPB insurgencies that posed a serious threat to the fledgling government. Civilian intelligence agencies were also created in the 1950s, consisting of the police Criminal Investigative Department (CID) that targeted internal conspiracies, the Special Investigations Department (SID) to handle both intelligence and counterintelligence functions focused on internal political movements, and the Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI) chartered to uncover economic crimes and corruption in government.¹³¹

The MIS initially focused its collection efforts on combat intelligence to support the Tatmadaw's counterinsurgency efforts and used very little coercion to gain intelligence from the insurgents. When Ne Win took control of the country, however, he quickly adopted Kempeitai methods.¹³² Ne Win appointed a former military colleague Tin Oo, to consolidate the intelligence services and create a new "security" establishment for domestic intelligence and counterintelligence to ensure his political survival¹³³ Tin Oo focused collection efforts on HUMINT, relying on paid informants to gather anti-government information and turn in suspected conspirators.

It was at this point that the Burmese government began to repress all segments of Burmese society using the Tatmadaw and intelligence services. The MIS earned its fearsome reputation among the Burmese for its use of mass arrests, executions, and torture. The MIS still conducted successful anti-insurgent intelligence operations by breaking CPB codes and infiltrating ethnic minority networks, but its primary focus

¹³⁰ James McAndrew, "From Combat to Karaoke: Burmese Military Intelligence, 1948-2006," Master's Thesis, (National Defense Intelligence College, 2007) 44.

¹³¹ Ibid., 46.

¹³² David I. Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001) 13.

¹³³ McAndrew, "From Combat to Karaoke," 50.

shifted to domestic intelligence operations. The MIS operated outside of the purview of the Tatmadaw and reported directly to Ne Win. MIS agents conducted periodic internal purges of high-ranking officers suspected of plotting against the regime.

J. JUNTA INTELLIGENCE

Fearing a power grab by the Directorate of Defense Intelligence Services (DDIS, formerly the MIS, renamed in 1969), Ne Win removed Tin Oo as head of the intelligence services, purged the DDIS, and appointed a loyal military officer, Khin Nyunt, in his place in 1983.¹³⁴ Khin Nyunt reformed the DDIS and, when the democracy protests began after Ne Win stepped down in 1988, worked with the Tatmadaw to crush the movement. The newly formed SLORC then gave the intelligence services the mission of ferreting out dissidents, which it performed efficiently and ruthlessly. As the ceasefire initiative gathered momentum, once again, the intelligence services were expanded to ensure ethnic minorities and the Burman-led democracy movement did not coalesce.

Khin Nyunt formed the Office of Strategic Studies (OSS) in a bid for greater political security.¹³⁵ The OSS consisted of five departments: international affairs; narcotics; security; ethnic affairs; and science and the environment.¹³⁶ OSS officers were hand-picked, well educated, and all spoke fluent English. The intelligence services continued to carry out the traditional functions of interrogations and tortures, but now the OSS gave the SLORC an intellectual capability previously lacking in the central government.¹³⁷ It was thus logical for the SLORC leadership to call on Khin Nyunt in the 1990s to broker the ceasefire agreements with insurgent groups. In doing so, the intelligence services gained access to black market economies in the insurgent states, which further bolstered their wealth and power.

Khin Nyunt successfully used traditional HUMINT collection techniques Kempeitai-like “neighborhood watch” programs, and source collection to gather

¹³⁴ Bertil Lintner, *Outrage* (London: White Lotus UK, 1990), 65.

¹³⁵ McAndrew, “From Combat to Karaoke,” 65.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Fink, *Living Silence*, 157.

information on the opposition. But he also introduced technology to include electronic monitoring, buying equipment from Russia, North Korea, and Singapore.¹³⁸ Despite or perhaps because of Khin Nyunt's success running Burma's intelligence operations, the Tatmadaw, whose leaders ultimately rule the country, began to sense a threat. In 2004, Senior General Than Shwe arrested Khin Nyunt and so began another purge of the intelligence services. Following the purge, the intelligence services were reformed under military command and regional commanders now oversee intelligence activities in their areas of operations. The SPDC, through its intelligence services, continues to prioritize internal threats, targeting the pro-democracy movement and concentrating on students and the education system and, most recently, the country's Buddhist monks.

K. OTHER METHODS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

The authoritarian rulers in Burma have also manipulated insurgent funding in other ways as part of the ‘Four Cuts’ strategy. The Ne Win regime, for instance, demonetarized the Burmese currency three times while in power. The third demonetarization of the kyat in 1987 was intended to bankrupt the insurgent economy by undercutting the black market, but led instead to a serious outbreak of riots and demonstrations (a precursor to the uprisings that followed in 1988).¹³⁹

Since 1988, the ruling junta has readdressed its counterinsurgency campaign policies, and directed much of its efforts to quell the pro-democracy movement. Since demonstrations and uprisings often originate from students at Burma's universities, the regime has made efforts to neutralize the universities. Following the 1988 uprising, many of Burma's largest universities were shut down for multiple years. Distance learning has been offered as an alternative to university attendance, since this allows students to study but minimizes their congregating on campuses.¹⁴⁰ Campuses have also been split and constructed away from the centers of larger cities. Regional campuses

¹³⁸ McAndrew, “From Combat to Karaoke,” 84.

¹³⁹ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*. 396.

¹⁴⁰ Steinberg, *Turmoil in Burma*, 75.

have been established to purposely disperse students across the country.¹⁴¹ It is much more difficult to “take to the streets” from a small rural campus than a university located in Rangoon or Mandalay, and in Burma today it takes only a hint of an uprising to give the regime the excuse it needs to close a university.

The ruling junta has likewise gone to great lengths to control information flows via telecommunications, the media, and the Internet. News media have no domestic freedom and journalists in Burma have faced severe scrutiny and intimidation. In 2008, ten journalists were imprisoned for writing articles deemed negative toward the government, with some receiving prison sentences of up to 19 years.¹⁴² Members of Burma’s censorship bureau pour over publications searching for anti-regime messages within the text.¹⁴³ Aung San Suu Kyi’s name cannot be mentioned in print unless the text slanders either her or the NLD. According to leading media watchdog group, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Burma is the worst Internet freedom violator, and the CPJ named Burma one of the ten worst countries in which to be a blogger.¹⁴⁴ One Burmese blogger is serving a 35-year prison term for distributing video footage of Cyclone Nargis.

The government blocks a great deal of Internet information entering the country, and during Nargis and the Saffron Revolution the junta completely shut down digital information coming into the country. Private Internet use is rare in Burma, and most Burmese rely on Internet cafes to go online. The cafes are closely monitored by government agents to detect negative information transmitted out of the country. Telecommunications are also tightly controlled and monitored by the junta through the Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), which runs the country’s phone service. The government has curtailed mobile phone usage by making the phones prohibitively expensive for average Burmese. In a world which continues to grow more connected

¹⁴¹ Steinberg, *Turmoil in Burma*, 75.

¹⁴² Saw Yan Naing. “Burmese Journalists Look Back at Threats to Media Freedom in 2008.” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, January 15, 2009, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/> (accessed May 13, 2009).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ BBC Worldwide Monitoring, “Burma ‘Worst Violator’ of Internet Freedom – Watchdog.” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, May 1, 2009. <http://www.lexisnexis.com/> (accessed May 13, 2009).

through the use of cell phones, satellite television, and cheap and fast Internet service, the ruling junta expends a great deal of effort to minimize their usage.

Cutting off its citizens from the world parallels the junta's recent move to isolate the country's leaders from the rest of the country. Establishing Naypyidaw (which means "abode of the kings") in 2007, the junta built the new capital on the advice of astrologers and out of fear of attack (from the West) given Rangoon's accessibility from the sea.¹⁴⁵ In a country stricken by almost daily power outages, the Naypyidaw is ablaze with lights from a power plant constructed to provide electricity to the chosen few who occupy positions of prominence in the government.¹⁴⁶

L. MILITARY LOYALTY

What is perhaps most remarkable about authoritarian rule in Burma over the past almost fifty years has been the unwavering loyalty of the military. Typical of many authoritarian regimes, the rulers have long used the intelligence services to monitor the activities of regional commanders. While purges of subordinate officers have occurred since the advent of military rule in Burma, for the most part the military has never posed a threat to power. While Burma's military rulers have neglected the development of a capable civil service, the trend for the government has been to lavish resources on its own support base, the Tatmadaw.¹⁴⁷ Military officers in the Tatmadaw receive numerous privileges including subsidized food, housing, health care, and education. Many families in Burma depend on relatives in the military to provide basic necessities. Military officers often seek further financial perks from involvement in the black market, border taxes, and the drug trade. The military also freely uses forced labor wherever it operates and the Tatmadaw has been insulated from declining revenue collection in recent years because the junta rarely cuts spending on the military.

¹⁴⁵ Rena Pederson, "Burma's Agony." *The Washington Post*, Section A, February 19, 2009, 15.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Neil A. Englehart, "Is Regime Change Enough for Burma? The Problem of State Capacity," *Asian Survey* (2005): 637.

M. EXTERNAL THREATS

Aside from ‘buying’ loyalty by making the military a lucrative career choice for individual Burmese, regimes since Ne Win’s day have effectively used threats from without to keep the military unified. Up until the demise of the CPB in 1989, the threat of a communist takeover served as rallying point for the Tatmadaw, and the SLORC pointed to an underlying communist conspiracy as the cause for the 1988 uprising. The threat of ethnic minority insurgencies similarly provided a common cause for the military. In recent years, possible Western intervention in Burma has provided a common focus for the Tatmadaw.

N. DIPLOMACY

As described earlier in the chapter, Burma’s authoritarian regimes have effectively neutralized ethnic insurgents’ bases of internal support by forcibly relocating or destroying villages. The ceasefires of the 1990s granted the Tatmadaw greater access to the border areas and control of key border crossings. Because the ethnic minority insurgents in Burma had been able to rely on cross-border sanctuaries in India and Bangladesh (Arakan, Chin), China (Kachin, Shan), and Thailand (Shan, Karen, Karenni) in the past, the SLORC/SPDC has actively pursued engagement with its neighbors since taking power in 1988. By improving relations with its neighbors, especially long-time rival Thailand, the SLORC/SPDC has diminished the ability of ethnic minorities or pro-democracy dissidents to find sanctuary. Here is one description of how the Thai government reversed its policy towards Karen insurgents:

Until the late 1980s, the Thai government tacitly allowed groups like the KNU to retreat into Thailand when they were under attack from [Burmese] government forces...yet, since the SLORC assumed power...Thai leaders have found it more advantageous to seek an improvement in their relations with the [Burmese] government. The insurgent groups have thus come under significant Thai pressure to reach peace with Rangoon...in the mid-1990's, the Thai authorities not only moved to stop the Burmese insurgents from retreating into safety across

the border, but on several occasions allowed the army to cross into Thailand and attack them from behind.¹⁴⁸

At the same time, in the 1990s India sought to improve ties with the junta in the hopes of limiting China's influence, and in 1995 the Indian and Burmese militaries conducted 'Operation Golden Bird' to capture insurgents along both sides of their shared border.¹⁴⁹ Counterinsurgency doctrine promotes denial of sanctuaries and, as stated in Army Field Manual 3-24, "Effective COIN operations work to eliminate all sanctuaries."¹⁵⁰ Galula points out that "the length of international borders, particularly if the neighboring countries are sympathetic to the insurgents, as was the case in Greece, Indochina, and Algeria, favors the insurgent."¹⁵¹ The SLORC has effectively overcome the need for closing its borders, which stretch over 3,600 miles by gaining the cooperation of its neighbors to withdraw or deny sanctuary to the junta's internal enemies.

O. CONCLUSION

The military in Burma has retained power for nearly half a century in spite of almost continual insurgency, internal resistance in the form of protest movements, and international pressure and sanctions. The current regime under Than Shwe consists of a group of military generals who lack worldly knowledge.¹⁵² Yet, this ruling junta, like Ne Win's previous administration, has run an effective counterinsurgency campaign. Nor does the current regime appear to be in jeopardy of relinquishing power in the near future.

The Western powers have been ineffective in influencing Burma to relent from policies which promote, or at the very least permit, human suffering. At the same time, Burma has been able to become less isolationist by establishing trade and diplomatic

¹⁴⁸ Pedersen, *Promoting Human Rights in Burma*, 147.

¹⁴⁹ Fink, *Living Silence*, 237.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Army, *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency* (Washington D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006) 1-16.

¹⁵¹ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 36.

¹⁵² Former Defense Attaché to Burma, interview by Dennis Heaney, December 30, 2008.

relations with its immediate neighbors and other non-Western countries in response to Western pressures to reform. Globalization has presented the junta numerous opportunities to expand trade to further line its pockets. The next chapter will examine external influences on Burma and implications for its future foreign policy.

IV. RESOURCES, DEVELOPMENT, AND REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE (POST-1988)

A. INTRODUCTION

Having nationalized Burma's primary industries and intentionally isolated the country from foreign investors, Ne Win's socialist experiment left Burma's economy in ruins. Only small reserves of foreign currency remained when he stepped down in 1988. Upon taking over the SLORC instituted a new private-enterprise-led market economy and offered incentives to foreign investors in order to gain desperately needed foreign currency.¹⁵³ The SLORC's new economic policy created an opening for foreign businesses. It is not surprising that since 1988 the countries with the most influence in Burma have been those with the most invested in the country. This chapter will first examine Burma's economic development since 1988 before turning to external influences. To be noted is that the SLORC/SPDC, has attempted to minimize outside interference in Burma's internal politics, even while opening the country to foreign investment and trade.

B. THE SLORC'S TRANSITION FROM NE WIN'S SOCIALISM

At the time of Ne Win's departure in 1988, Burma's currency, the Kyat, was artificially overvalued and the official exchange rate was 6 Kyat to the US\$1, while the unofficial or black market rate was running between 300 and 400 Kyat to US\$1.¹⁵⁴ The SLORC needed foreign investors and foreign currency to develop its various enterprises, especially to extract its reserves of natural gas and oil. Consequently, it passed the Foreign Investment Law (FIL) to attract foreign investors by offering a number of financial incentives to prospective businesses.¹⁵⁵

In addition to its untapped natural resources, Burma offered a large labor pool at extremely low wages. However, despite high rates of literacy, Burmese lacked technical

¹⁵³ Stephen McCarthy, "Ten Years of Chaos in Burma: Foreign Investment and Economic Liberalization under the SLORC-SPDC, 1988 to 1998." *Pacific Affairs* (2000): 233.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 236.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 235.

skills. Investment in some industries required firms to provide their own skilled labor, thus raising costs. The other prohibitive drawback to investment in Burma was the requirement for foreign investors to exchange their currency at the official exchange rate when entering and exiting the country. The SLORC controlled the banking system and set interest rates. With banks offering negative interest rates to depositors, private investors were (and still are) forced to resort to the black market for collateral loans at 3 to 4 percent per month and non-collateral loans at 5 to 8 percent per month.¹⁵⁶ With foreign investors deterred by currency exchange obstacles and little investment capital to draw from Burmese banks, the SLORC looked to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to provide loans to facilitate its economic development. The World Bank and IMF, under pressure from the U.S., were unwilling to provide loans to Burma due to the SLORC's violent repression of the pro-democracy movement.¹⁵⁷

A further investment disincentive since the late 1980s has been the lack of developed infrastructure in Burma. Roads outside of the large cities are often in poor condition and impassible for heavy vehicles, especially during the monsoons/rainy season. Railroads, ports, and storage facilities are inadequate to support rapid development.

However, despite all of the problems facing foreign investors in Burma in the 1990s, international businesses still streamed in to exploit Burma's reserves of oil and natural gas, deposits of minerals, vast teak forests, and rich fisheries. The SLORC also saw tourism as a way to draw foreign currency and attempted to build up the transportation infrastructure and hotel industry. But the resource that has been, and is to this day, most lucrative to the Burmese junta is natural gas.

C. RESOURCES AND TRADE

1. Natural Gas

Cumulatively, Burma's natural gas fields hold over 500 billion cubic meters of natural gas which is enough to bring in \$2 billion annually to the junta for the next 40

¹⁵⁶ Stephen McCarthy, "Ten Years of Chaos in Burma," 240.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 242.

years.¹⁵⁸ The Burmese government began earning revenue from natural gas with the completion of the Yadana field project in 1998. Yadana, which carries gas from the Gulf of Martaban to Thailand via a 256 mile pipeline, was a joint venture of Burma's state-owned energy company, the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), in partnership with Total Oil (France), Unocal (United States), and PTT Exploration and Production (PTTE – Thailand).¹⁵⁹

Another gas project, the Yetagan fields, came online in 2000 and was developed by a consortium made up of MOGE, Nippon Oil (Japan), and Premier Oil (UK).¹⁶⁰ Premier dropped out of the Yetagan Project in response to domestic consumer protests and was replaced by the Malaysian company, Petronas. The Yadana and Yetagan projects have been controversial internationally thanks to accusations made by environmental groups of forced labor conscripted by the Tatmadaw to work on the project, and the displacement of villages to make room for the pipeline on its way to Thailand. Total and Unocal have publicly denied allegations of human rights abuses and point to their chief responsibility, which is to maximize profits for their shareholders. As Unocal put it: “Unocal is a global energy company, not a political agency. Our participation in the Yadana project is based on resource potential, business economics and technical expertise.”¹⁶¹

Another large deposit of natural gas was discovered off the Arakan coast in 2004.¹⁶² This new set of fields, known as the Shwe (Gold) fields was explored by a consortium that partnered MOGE with South Korea’s Daewoo Corporation, the Korean Gas Corporation, the Gas Authority of India Limited, and India’s Oil and Natural Gas Corporation.¹⁶³ India was presumed to be the customer for the Shwe Gas Fields, but

¹⁵⁸ Sean Turnell, “Burma’s Insatiable State,” *Asian Survey* (2008): 960.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ John R. Schermerhorn, Jr. “Terms of Global Business Engagement in Ethically Challenging Environments: Applications to Burma.” *Business Ethics Quarterly* (1999) 490.

¹⁶² Wayne M. Morrison and Bruce Vaughn, “China-Southeast Asia Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications for the United States.” *CRS Report for Congress* (2006) CRS-24. The estimates were 89 trillion cubic meters of gas well in excess of the Yadana and Yetagan reserves.

¹⁶³ Turnell, “Burma’s Insatiable State,” 962.

difficulties arose when Bangladesh refused to allow the pipeline to cross its borders without concessions. The Burmese junta reconsidered its contracts with India and three days after China vetoed a punitive Security Council resolution, the Burmese government granted a Chinese company a major gas and oil exploration contract even though an Indian company outbid the Chinese company.¹⁶⁴

In all of this, the SLORC/SPDC, while adopting a capitalist-type approach to development, has proved willing to default to whatever it deems best for maintaining power. In this case, its security relationship with China outweighed its profit margin on a project.

2. Tourism

The second most popular boom area for foreign investors is in hotels and tourism.¹⁶⁵ Uncharacteristically, and again shedding its isolationist stance, the regime opened the country to foreign tourists in the 1990s. In 1990, a Tourism Law recognized tourism as a significant economic activity, allowing local and foreign private operators to run hotels, transport businesses, and tour guide services.¹⁶⁶ The SLORC officially designated 1996 as “Visit Myanmar Year” in order to entice organized tour operators from Europe and Asia and to encourage hotel construction.¹⁶⁷ Even though the SLORC privatized tourism on the surface, the regime again turned to forced labor to renovate historical sites and build hotels and infrastructure. Villagers were displaced to make room for new construction.

Yet, with fluctuations in electricity, very little public health care, and watchful agents throughout the country, Burma, while possessing tremendous natural beauty, is not for the casual traveler. Also, in 1996 Aung San Suu Kyi initiated an anti-tourism campaign to boycott the government’s tourism initiatives. This has helped dissuade

¹⁶⁴ Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Andrew Small. “China’s New Dictatorship Diplomacy; Is Beijing Parting with Pariahs?” *Foreign Affairs* (2008): 5.

¹⁶⁵ McCarthy, “Ten Years of Chaos in Burma,” 245.

¹⁶⁶ Simon Hudson, “To Go Or Not To Go? Ethical Perspectives on Tourism in an ‘Outpost of Tyranny,’” *Journal of Business Ethics* (2006) 385.

¹⁶⁷ McCarthy, “Ten Years of Chaos in Burma,” 245.

many Western tourists from traveling to Burma. But in spite of these deterrents, the tourism industry still manages to bring in substantial amounts of foreign currency for the government.

3. Teak and Hardwood

Burma's teak industry has its roots in the British colonial period and, interestingly, Burmese teak growers adopted scientific forestry cultivation techniques from Central Europe in the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁸ Under the British, Burma had what many regard as the finest forest service in the world.¹⁶⁹ In the mid-twentieth century, Burma utilized full management plans for its forests, unlike its neighbors India, Laos, and especially Thailand, which devastated its teak and/or hardwood forests. But again, the need for foreign currency led the SLORC in 1988 to increase teak exports and invite foreign firms to log teak and hardwood forests while paying logging concessions to the government. By 1992/93, twenty-eight percent of production was by foreign firms, many from Thailand (which banned logging in Thailand in 1989 due to erosion caused by deforestation).¹⁷⁰

China has participated in agreements to log teak and hardwoods in the Shan and Kachin states, which have experienced severe deforestation. The grim condition of Burma's economy in the late 1980s, combined with the end of kerosene production by the government and a growing population, led to overuse of wood for cooking and building materials. Illegal logging has also had dire effects on forest conservation. Some estimate that 98% of Burma's timber exports to China were illegally logged from 2001 to 2004.¹⁷¹ The short-term gains in logging profits by the government neglect the potential long term damage to Burma's forest from overcutting, especially of teak which requires three to five decades to replace.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Peter John Perry, *Myanmar (Burma) Since 1962: The Failure of Development* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 85.

¹⁶⁹ Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar*, 145.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Sun Wyler, "Burma and Transnational Crime," CRS-5.

¹⁷² Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar*, 146.

4. Gems

Gems (rubies, sapphires, jade, and other gems) have been traded in Burma since the time of the kingdoms. In the 1960s, the Burmese government nationalized the gemstone industry, appointed military personnel to jobs in the precious stone trade and, by doing so, drove a large portion of the gemstone trade underground.¹⁷³

The SLORC/SPDC has relied on the gem trade to generate foreign currency and global gem exports from Burma in fiscal year 2007-2008 reached as high as \$647 million.¹⁷⁴ In 2008, the U.S. passed the Tom Lantos Burmese JADE (Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act, which bans the import of Burmese gems to the United States.¹⁷⁵ Although several Western countries have banned Burmese gems, the SLORC/SPDC is able to export gems through India, China, and Thailand to world markets and sanctions have had little effect on the Burmese gem trade.¹⁷⁶

5. Fishing

With an extensive coastline, good ocean conditions, and a large demand in the region for fish, Burma's fishing industry has great potential. The fishing industry was not exploited prior to the SLORC assuming power. The SLORC sought to quickly cash in on its abundant fish resources by granting fishing concessions to neighboring countries. In 1988, the Burmese Government sold fishing rights in Burma's offshore areas to Thai, Malaysian, Korean, and Singaporean fishing firms.¹⁷⁷ As with Burma's other extractive industries, decades of long term planning and regulation were compromised to allow for rapid exploitation to produce cash flows. Consequently overfishing in Burma has become a cause of concern for environmentalists, with depletion of fisheries headed down the same path as in neighboring Thailand.

¹⁷³ Perry, *Myanmar (Burma) Since 1962*, 100-101.

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch, "US: Burma Gem Strengthened," *US Federal News Service, including US State News* (July 29, 2008) <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed April 29, 2009).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Kachin, Shan, and Karen insurgents have also used gems to fund their rebellions via direct trade or by taxing gems as they are moved across the border to Thailand or China.

¹⁷⁷ Mya Than, *Myanmar's External Trade: an Overview in the Southeast Asian Context* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992), 31.

D. FOREIGN ENGAGEMENT

1. China

Following the 1988 crisis, subsequent crackdown by the SLORC, and nullification of the 1990 election, Burma was vilified by the West and India. Thailand, for instance, responded to the 1988 crisis by providing safe haven to Burmese dissidents. On the other hand, this is exactly when Burma's relationship with its longtime adversary China began to improve. When China ended its support for the CPB the SLORC was relieved of a major external threat.¹⁷⁸ Subsequently, China adopted a good-neighbor policy during the 1990s and, as Jurgen Haacke points out, Burma reaped immediate benefits:

First, China deflected Western human-rights criticism targeting Myanmar. At the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1990, Beijing prevented the adoption of the first-ever draft resolution on the human-rights situation in Myanmar (but thereafter fell into line, allowing future draft resolutions to be adopted by consensus). Second, an initial border trade agreement reached in 1988 paved the way for substantial economic exchange with China. Following Than Shwe's visit to China in October 1989, Chinese and particularly Yunnanese state companies began to play major parts in the economic reconstruction of northern Myanmar, especially by building power stations, roads, bridges, and telecommunications facilities. In return, Myanmar agreed to exploitation by Chinese companies of natural resources in the ethnic-minority areas along the border. Third, two substantial arms deals with China in 1990 and 1994, worth about US\$2.1 billion and US\$400 million respectively, allowed the Tatmadaw to replenish and upgrade its armaments for counterinsurgency operations and conventional war-fighting on land and sea.¹⁷⁹

China's extraordinary economic expansion in the late 1990s created a corresponding need for energy and natural resources, and the Chinese government has prioritized development of Yunnan Province and southwest China, which economically lag far behind the coastal areas in development.¹⁸⁰ Burma's untapped energy resources

¹⁷⁸ Jurgen Haacke, *Myanmar's Foreign Policy: Domestic Influences and International Implications* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 17.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁸⁰ Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, "China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy," 2.

and geographic location make the country key to these two Chinese development goals. Chinese influence has spread south to Mandalay, and thousands of Chinese have settled in the Kachin State with the SLORC, surprisingly, issuing new Burmese identity cards, which grant Chinese the same rights as Burmese nationals.¹⁸¹

Since 1989, China has assisted Burma in a multitude of development projects, and thus Burma has been perceived to be a Chinese client state. However, after initial Chinese cooperation and investment in the 1990s, the SLORC/SPDC has tried to diversify its dependence on its expansive neighbor. Because China sank money into infrastructure projects, it has been thought that China looks to Burma as a future forward base of operations in Southeast Asia, and that China is seeking permanent bases, especially sea bases for its navy.¹⁸² But although the SLORC/SPDC may have opened Burma to Chinese foreign investment, the regime has attempted to minimize bilateral political or military dependence on China. For instance, the regime has bought weapons from Russia, Israel, Pakistan, India, North Korea, Ukraine, and Singapore.¹⁸³

From China's point of view, Burma serves political and not just potentially useful military purposes. China's push to establish its international legitimacy, showcased by the extravagant 2008 summer Olympic Games, led to more pressure being put on it to address humanitarian and security issues with partner nations North Korea, Sudan, Iran, Zimbabwe, and Burma.¹⁸⁴ China sought to moderate the SPDC's hard line on dissidents and turned to Prime Minister Khin Nyunt (whom China considered a Deng Xiaoping style reformer) to transform policy.¹⁸⁵ When Khin Nyunt was ousted in 2004, the junta took a harder stance on protestors and China's ability to sway the regime to more moderate policies faded.

¹⁸¹ Donald M. Seekins. "Burma-China Relations: Playing with Fire," *Asian Survey* (2007), 530.

¹⁸² Elliot Wilson, "Business as Usual with the Burmese Generals." *The Spectator* (2008) 2. Chinese military influence in Burma still has the potential to grow as the Chinese have shifted priorities to developing their navy to protect their vital sea lines of communication. China is currently building a huge blue-water port in the Bay of Bengal with potential to act as a docking facility for China's increasingly powerful navy.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, "China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy," 2.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.

Nevertheless, China did not turn its back on its key strategic ally. In mid-2006, the United States circulated a resolution in the Security Council demanding the release of political prisoners, condemning Burma's human rights practices, and calling for a political process that would lead to a genuine democratic transition, but China vetoed the resolution—the first time since 1973 that Beijing vetoed any matter unrelated to Taiwan.¹⁸⁶ China at times treats Burma as a client state, but also attempts to distance it from the junta following brutal episodes of repression. Following the junta's recent violent reaction to the Saffron Revolution, the Chinese regime carefully balanced its response to the incident in the international press. The Burmese junta continues to rely on China and to a lesser extent Russia to shield it from the influence of the U.S., Britain, and France on the UN Security Council.

What does the future hold for Burma's relationship with China? It seems that as China becomes increasingly influential in world politics the Chinese might seek greater legitimacy in the realm of foreign affairs. Under these circumstances, China would feel pressure to use its influence on the junta to improve governance and curtail its human rights abuses. However, so long as Burma provides much-needed natural resources to the Chinese and so long as its own poor human rights record and the Tibet occupation remain sources of international controversy, change in Burma's relationship with China is unlikely.

2. Thailand

Thailand's relationship with its long time rival Burma improved in the mid 1990s. With Burma's admission to ASEAN in 1997, relations between the two countries looked promising. Spillover from Burma's domestic problems such as refugees, illegal immigrants, and an increasing influx of synthetic drugs did concern Thailand.¹⁸⁷ From the SPDC's perspective, the Thai government's continued allowance of border camps that provided sanctuary to Burmese refugees only protracted the rebellion in Burma.

¹⁸⁶ Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, "China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy," 5.

¹⁸⁷ Haacke, *Myanmar's Foreign Policy*, 46.

Nevertheless, positive relations continued as Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatrad committed his government to addressing the SPDC's main bilateral grievances.¹⁸⁸

Since 2004, Thailand has made passage through its border for Burma's dissidents more difficult. Burma, for its part, has encouraged investment by Thailand and, according to the Thailand Foreign Trade Department, Thailand now ranks third among foreign investors in Burma.¹⁸⁹ Beginning with Khin Nyunt's visit to Thailand in 2001, Burma and Thailand have signed agreements addressing issues from illegal labor and repatriation of refugees to counternarcotics and fishery rights. As described previously, gas pipelines reached Thailand in 1998, and in 2006, Thailand experienced its first budget deficit with Burma in eighteen years.¹⁹⁰ Also in 2006, the two countries agreed to build a hydroelectric power plant on the Thanlwin River with Chinese assistance.

Thailand has deftly implemented a classic hedging strategy by maintaining good relations with both China and the United States, even though it has defied the U.S. in its recent engagement policies towards Burma.¹⁹¹ Thailand has also defended Burma within ASEAN in light of international pressure on the Association to sanction Burma. Thailand sided with Burma after accusations were leveled against Thailand for its human rights abuses and, in the 2004 ASEAN conference, Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin threatened to walk out of the conference if the Tak Bai incident was raised by fellow ASEAN leaders.¹⁹² Recently however, Thailand's Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has called for Burma to do more for its citizens.¹⁹³ Abhisit announced that the Thai government would adopt a "flexible engagement" strategy to foster open and frank discussion on issues such

¹⁸⁸ Haacke, *Myanmar's Foreign Policy*, 48.

¹⁸⁹ Petchanet Pratrueangkrai, "Protection Pact with Burma Soon," *The Nation* (2008), 1.

¹⁹⁰ Supamart Kasem. "Thailand sees First Trade Deficit with Burma in 18 Years." *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*. (2007) <http://www.lexisnexis.com/> (accessed May 15, 2009).

¹⁹¹ Denny Roy, "Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (2005) 315.

¹⁹² Haacke, *Myanmar's Foreign Policy*, 54. The Tak Bai Incident occurred in Southern Thailand in October 2004, when protesters took to the streets following the arrest of six Muslim men. Royal Thai Army soldiers arrested scores of protestors, bound them, and placed them in the backs of trucks for transport to an army camp for processing. An estimated 85 protestors died of suffocation. The incident drew strong reactions from both the international and Thai communities and was attributed to Thaksin's heavy handedness in dealing with the Muslim movement in Southern Thailand.

¹⁹³ Wai Moe, "Thai PM says 'time for A Change' in Burma," *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific* (January 16, 2009) <http://www.lexisnexis.com/> (accessed May 16, 2009) 1.

as human rights, leading to cooperative solutions that will make Southeast Asia a more secure and prosperous region.¹⁹⁴ With Abhisit recently appointed to chair the ASEAN, one has to wonder, though, how much his statement should be attributed to political rhetoric.

The U.S. and EU have pressured Thailand to use its influence to get Burma to live up to its commitment to hold elections in 2010. Thailand, embroiled in its own internal struggle in Southern Thailand, needs Western support for its counterinsurgency efforts, but still seeks open trade with Burma. For a host of reasons, Thailand's relationship with Burma will likely continue to be a balancing act of East versus West, with the Thais attempting to stay in the good graces of the West while benefitting economically from trade relations with Burma and China.

3. India

India is another country that has reversed its policies toward Burma based on its desire for stability in its northeast region, a growing need for raw materials to feed its industrial growth, and security concerns over Chinese expansion into the Bay of Bengal. In 1988, after the SLORC's crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, India became its most vociferous critic.¹⁹⁵ India provided NLD protestors modest support when they fled to the Burma-India border, and again in 1990 when Burmese dissidents hijacked a Thai Airways plane and had it flown to India; Indian officials released the hijackers much to the anger of the SLORC.¹⁹⁶

India's stance toward Burma began to change in the early 1990s following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Around this time, China improved its relations with Pakistan and Bangladesh and, as the Chinese increased trade and diplomacy with Burma, India felt China squeezing it via its neighbors. As a result, India decided to place economics and security ahead of political and human rights considerations.¹⁹⁷ In the latter part of the

¹⁹⁴ Flexible engagement involves publicly commenting on and collectively discussing fellow members' domestic policies when these either have regional implications or adversely affect the disposition of other ASEAN members.

¹⁹⁵ Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar*, 231.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Haacke, *Myanmar's Foreign Policy*, 34.

1990s as Burma looked to diversify and actively sought political and military exchanges and economic cooperation with India, India was receptive.¹⁹⁸

For decades, Burma turned a blind eye to the presence of anti-Indian groups operating out of the remote Naga, Patkai, and Lushai hills, while India offered tacit support to Kachin rebels.¹⁹⁹ Following the Kachin ceasefire in 1993, India pushed for military cooperation with Burma leading to the Indian Army and Tatmadaw conducting a joint counterinsurgency operation called Golden Bird.²⁰⁰ Cooperation between Burma and India has partially neutralized the anti-Indian insurgencies in the northeast part of India. However, despite arms sales to Burma and Indian intelligence provided to the Tatmadaw, the Indians have still been frustrated by the Tatmadaw's lack of progress in eliminating insurgents in the border areas.

Anticipating the economic rise of Southeast Asia, India adopted a “Look East Policy” in 1991 to gain increased economic and strategic influence in the region.²⁰¹ Burma and India opened their first official border crossing in 1995 and bilateral trade between the two countries grew from \$62.15 million in fiscal year 1988-89 to a remarkable \$328.53 million in 1997-98.²⁰² India initiated numerous economic projects with Burma in the 1990s to include railway and port construction, hydroelectric plants, and natural resource extraction ventures. India has had some success tapping into natural gas reserves from Burma, but, as previously mentioned, the Chinese trumped the Indians in developing the Sittwe natural gas project in Arakan.

Countering China’s influence in Burma has been a top priority in New Delhi. India has been wary of China’s increased military influence in Burma through arms sales and the potential for Chinese naval facilities to be built in the Bay of Bengal. India, in response, has embarked on a “constructive engagement” strategy toward Burma.²⁰³ In

¹⁹⁸ Haacke, *Myanmar’s Foreign Policy*, 34.

¹⁹⁹ Renaud Eggeret, “India’s Ambition in Burma: More Frustration than Success?” *Asian Survey* (2008), 940.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 941.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Constructive Engagement is defined as the policy of maintaining limited political and business links with a country while continuing to demand political or social reform in that country.

recent years, the Indian Navy has increased cooperation with Burma's Navy. India has conducted bilateral Indo-Burmese naval exercises and docked its naval ships in Rangoon.

Although New Delhi over the past fifteen years has grown substantially closer to the Burmese junta, Burma's xenophobic view of India dating back to colonial times when India dominated Burma, still creates an underlying sense of mistrust especially of Indian nationals living in Burma.²⁰⁴ However, along with China, India has the greatest international influence on the SPDC, and will be a key factor in bringing about change in Burmese international politics.

4. Japan

Japan's relationship with modern Burma largely originates in Japan's World War II occupation and the evolution of independent Burma's early leadership, several of whose members belonged to the Thirty Comrades. Post-World War II Japan paid war reparations to Burma, the first Asian country to receive these payments. Reparations paved the way for further Japanese assistance given to Burma during Ne Win's reign. Japan provided two thirds of all the bilateral (nation-to-nation) Official Development Assistance (ODA) disbursements to Burma, amounting to US\$1.94 billion in grants and loans between 1970 and 1988.²⁰⁵

Tokyo's dealings with its longtime ally Ne Win were much more conciliatory than with follow-on regimes. The inept socialist government of the BSSP made Japanese investment in Burma risky. When the SLORC opened Burma to foreign investors after 1988, Japan faced the dilemma of either falling in line with Western sanctions or exploiting economic opportunities in Burma. Japan adopted 'quiet dialogue' as an alternative to sanctions. Quiet dialogue called for open discussion to persuade the Burmese to work toward democracy and prioritize human rights.²⁰⁶ The Japanese resumed ODA in 1989, and initially believed that their assistance (as part of their 'quiet dialogue' effort) helped prompt the SLORC to call for open elections in 1990.²⁰⁷ When

²⁰⁴ Egreteteau, "India's Ambition in Burma: More Frustration than Success?" 954.

²⁰⁵ Seekins, *Burma and Japan Since 1940*, 62.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 93-94.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 99.

the SLORC nullified the 1990 elections, the Japanese distanced themselves from Burma. But with the improved economic situation in 1994, Japanese companies pushed to re-engage, and the Japanese construction company Mitsui Bussan, All Nippon Airlines, and Nippon Oil Company all invested in projects in Burma.²⁰⁸

The Japanese have encountered problems similar to those of other foreign investors who must maneuver through Burma's ineffective banking system and artificial exchange rate. Over time, they have tended to weight their investments toward the extractive industries, tapping into Burma's natural resources of natural gas, teak, and gems. The Japanese have shied away from perceived risky Burmese investments, anticipating possible SPDC interference or, at worst, nationalization.

Japan has continued to provide assistance to Burma, but has differed with the United States on the nature of its 'humanitarian' aid. To the Japanese, 'humanitarian' aid includes refurbishing older infrastructure, such as hydroelectric plants and the Rangoon Airport. The U.S. definition of humanitarian aid is assistance to improve health, education, nutrition, and agriculture.²⁰⁹ Japanese policy toward Burma remains ambiguous as it condemns the junta and yet believes it can sway the regime with carrots. The SPDC does not view Japan as a strong ally as Ne Win did, and with China playing a dominant role in Burma's affairs, the Japanese are marginalized in their influence.

5. Bangladesh

Bangladesh's importance to the ruling junta stems from its geographic location as a border country and thanks to shared maritime boundaries near large deposits of natural gas. Over the past decade, there has been a sharp rise in trade between the two countries. Bilateral trade between Burma and Bangladesh now stands at US \$140 million.²¹⁰ However, the two countries have mobilized forces along the border after Burma's navy intruded into Bangladesh's waters in November 2008, and tension has further grown over

²⁰⁸ Seekins, *Burma and Japan Since 1940*, 119.

²⁰⁹ David I. Steinberg, "The United States and Its Allies: The Problem of Burma/Myanmar Policy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (2007) 225.

²¹⁰ BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Bangladeshi Trade Delegation to Visit Burma 18 Feb," *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, February 21, 2009. <http://www.lexisnexis.com/> (accessed May 18, 2009).

the issue of the status of Muslim Rohingya. As the result of a Tatmadaw offensive against Muslim insurgents back in 1991-92, an estimated 250,000 Rohingya crossed the Burmese border into the Cox Bazaar region of Bangladesh.²¹¹ While the majority of the Rohingya returned to Burma after intervention by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the un-repatriated Rohingya remains a problem in Burma.²¹²

Trade has increased significantly between the two countries over the past decade and Burma can further strengthen its regional position through good relations with Bangladesh. Internal issues that generate regional problems continue to hamper the junta's desire to expand influence in the region. If Burma cannot resolve its maritime border or Rohingya refugee problems with Bangladesh, then the SPDC potentially will lose legitimacy as its problems spill over to negatively impact other countries in the region.

6. Singapore

Aside from China, Singapore was Burma's largest investor and has long provided Burma with military hardware and telecommunications equipment.²¹³ Singapore has been accused of laundering Burmese drug money, although the Singaporean Government strongly denies this.²¹⁴ Using a 'constructive engagement' approach, Singaporeans have invested heavily in hotel construction and management, built shopping centers, and provided transportation and other services to tourists in Burma. Singapore, which itself employs tight control measures over its population, has engaged in trade and investment with Burma without condemning the junta's repressiveness. Singapore's position is not

²¹¹ Martin Smith "Burmese Politics after 1988: An era of New and Uncertain Change," in *Burma: Political Economy under Military Rule*, 15-40 (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001), 33.

²¹² Ibid. Denied citizenship at home in Burma, an estimated 200,000 Rohingya live in squalid border camps in Bangladesh. Many Rohingya try to get to Thailand (and Malaysia) where they seek work or asylum. The Thais claim that the Rohingya enter Malaysia or migrate to Southern Thailand to join the Muslim insurgency. Malaysia, a Muslim majority country, has protested to the UNHCR about the plight of the Rohingya, yet in Malaysia many Rohingya work long hours in oppressive conditions for pennies a day.

²¹³ Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar*, 240.

²¹⁴ Jurgen Ruland, "Burma Ten Years after the Uprising: the Regional Dimension," in *Burma: Political Economy under Military Rule*. 137-158 (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001), 140.

to judge the SLORC/SPDC.²¹⁵ The fact that Singapore is powerful trading partner, but does not appear willing to link trade or investment with reform further undercuts Western sanctions.

7. European Union

Since the 1980s, European governments have promoted human rights and fundamental freedoms through implementation of the European Union's (EU) Common Foreign and Security Policy.²¹⁶ In 1996, the EU passed the 'Common Position' on Burma.²¹⁷ Since the late 1990s the ruling Burmese junta has pursued three objectives: first, to improve Burma's image in Europe through information campaigns which seek to persuade European decision-makers to adopt a more empathetic and productive position on Burma; second, to win more humanitarian assistance for Burma; and third, to gain admission to two major inter-regional dialogues, the ASEAN-EU and Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM).²¹⁸ Both of these dialogues promote trade and investment between countries on both continents.

Although the Burmese government has not been very successful in swaying the EU to relax any of its sanctions or policies, EU sanctions are not nearly as stringent or restrictive as U.S. sanctions. The 'Common Position' imposes restrictions on trade and travel, and embargoes arms, munitions, and related equipment. It suspends economic aid, excepting humanitarian and poverty aid, as well as visas for higher-level senior junta officers.²¹⁹ In the aftermath of the Saffron Revolution, the EU banned firms from buying gems, timber, and metal from Burma.²²⁰

²¹⁵ Eric Ellis, "Web of Cash, Power and Cronies; Singapore has helped Burma's Junta stay afloat for 20 Years," *The Age (Melbourne Australia)*, (2007) 1.

²¹⁶ Haacke, *Myanmar's Foreign Policy*, 77.

²¹⁷ Steinberg, "The United States and its Allies." 226.

²¹⁸ Haacke, *Myanmar's Foreign Policy*, 78.

²¹⁹ Steinberg, "The United States and its Allies," 226. "Common Position" is a term used by the EU to describe a unanimous stance agreed to by its members.

²²⁰ David Cronin, "EU: Ban Prevents Firms from Buying Burmese Gems, Timber, and Metal." *Global Information Network* (2007).

At a meeting in Brussels in 2008, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) criticized the EU for not being restrictive enough against Burma.²²¹ The ITUC argued that, despite the additional post-Saffron Revolution sanctions, the EU, by not banning the sale and trade of natural gas and oil with European firms, has not gone far enough in hurting the junta.²²² For instance, the French firm Total has been generating cash flows from natural gas for the junta since the 1990s, of which very little has trickled down to the Burmese population. The United States continually urges the EU to step up its sanctions. But, as demonstrated in the past two decades, the EU derives benefits from a portion of its investments in Burma that it is not willing to give up.

8. ASEAN

Formed in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) originally consisted of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. Five more Southeast Asian nations joined ASEAN between 1984 and 1999, to include Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, and Cambodia. The ASEAN Declaration states that the aims and purposes of the Association are: (1) to accelerate economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in the region; and (2) to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.²²³ At bottom, the Association’s “ASEAN Way” is moral suasion – the belief (or hope) that member states will do the right thing so as not to embarrass the collectivity.²²⁴

Burma has neither met the intent of the ASEAN Declaration nor acted in an “ASEAN Way.” ASEAN, however, has a non-interference norm that states that each member’s domestic affairs are not any other member’s concern. So, while Burma clearly violates the intent of ASEAN’s goals, no other member state has taken action to make

²²¹ The ITUC’s primary mission is the promotion and defense of workers’ rights and interests through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning, and advocacy within the major global institutions.

²²² Cronin. “EU: Ban Prevents Firms from Buying Burmese.”

²²³ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, <http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm> (accessed May 4, 2009).

²²⁴ Sheldon Simon, “ASEAN and Multilateralism: The Long, Bumpy Road to Community,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, (2008), 267.

Burma comply. In 2007 ASEAN drew up a new Charter which was signed by all ten members stipulating norms such as democracy and human rights.²²⁵ This formal commitment to human rights and democracy associates ASEAN with such prominent international institutions as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU), as well as the UN.²²⁶

Burma's nullification of the 1990 elections and subsequent decades-long repression of pro-democracy dissidents, combined with its atrocious human rights record, creates an international credibility problem for ASEAN. Furthermore, the ruling junta's refusal to release Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest has led ASEAN members to appeal to the junta to work through the UN to secure her release. ASEAN members resent Burma's actions and their inability to force the SPDC to reform has created rifts within the organization. At the same time, the United States and the European Union consistently pressure ASEAN to persuade Burma to reform, much to the annoyance of ASEAN's members. ASEAN was originally established to create a union of smaller nations to minimize outside influence by the superpowers and what Burma has done in many members' view is to bring undesirable international attention. One can only wonder what might happen if house arrest for Aung San Suu Kyi is not ended as scheduled in May 2009, and if the 2010 elections are exposed as a sham or nullified by the junta as occurred in 1990. Will ASEAN be willing to once again lose worldwide credibility on Burma's behalf, or will it be willing to cut Burma away?

E. CONCLUSION

Burma is a country that welcomed foreign investment and trade after Ne Win stepped down in 1988. The country's natural resources, abundant and inexpensive labor pool, and relative control over its population, make potential external investors willing to overlook the junta's repression. Easily extractable (if not also 'lootable') Burmese resources draw short term, risk-averse investors, who are seldom particularly interested in the country's long-term future. Meanwhile, there are Burma's neighbors who have a

²²⁵ Simon, "ASEAN and Multilateralism," 278.

²²⁶ Ibid.

geopolitical stake in Burma's future, and are reluctant to intercede in the SPDC's internal affairs, no matter how egregious the junta's crimes against its own population. Western activists' ability to curb the regime's human rights violations have been marginalized by the SPDC's relations with countries not providing Burma with critical goods it depends on. Ironically, several Western companies have been critical to Burma's development of its natural gas infrastructure. Pressure to reform has been scant from key regional players, particularly the ASEAN countries who stand by the Association's non-interference principle, allowing Burma's human rights abuses and corruption to go unchecked. China, which uses harsh measures to control its own population, has refrained from reprimanding Burma and will remain Burma's strongest ally and its most outspoken defender in the UN.

The next chapter will examine the effects U.S. sanctions have had on the ruling junta and explore U.S. options to effect change, along with what sets of change(s) the U.S. might want to seek.

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V. CONCLUSION

*For us, giving a banana to the monkey and then asking it to dance is not the way. We are not monkeys.*²²⁷

U Win Aung
Burmese Foreign Minister

A. UNITED STATES SANCTIONS

The United States has sought for two decades to compel the ruling Burmese junta through economic sanctions to reform its human rights abuses. In the wake of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising in Burma, the U.S. cut off all bilateral and multinational financial aid and development assistance, prohibited arms sales, and downgraded diplomatic representation in Burma from ambassador to a charge d' affaires.²²⁸ In 1997, the Clinton Administration imposed a ban on new foreign investment in Burma. And, in 2003, President George W. Bush signed into law a much stronger set of economic sanctions, the “Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act.”²²⁹

The 2003 sanctions consist of four main components: an extension of the visa ban on officials of the SPDC and USDA; a freeze on the U.S. assets of Burmese officials; a ban on financial transactions between American parties and “entities of the Rangoon regime” (save for those that receive special exemptions from the U.S. Treasury Department, such as NGOs working on humanitarian projects); and, most importantly, an embargo on all imports from Burma to the United States.²³⁰ Following the Saffron Revolution in 2007, President Bush further strengthened the 2003 sanctions, identifying

²²⁷ Fink, *Living Silence*, 4.

²²⁸ McCarthy, “Ten Years of Chaos in Burma,” 257.

²²⁹ Donald M. Seekins. “Burma and U.S. Sanctions: Punishing an Authoritarian Regime,” *Asian Survey*, (2005) 439.

²³⁰ Ibid., 439-440.

more SPDC leaders and their families for visa restrictions, and freezing assets for 11 more officials.²³¹ The President also tightened export control regulations on “dual-use” and high performance computers to Burma.²³²

These sanctions were intended to punish the regime for human rights abuses while indirectly showing support for Aung San Suu Kyi and the democratic movement, as well as for ethnic minorities. Somehow, it was assumed this would pressure the ruling junta to change its policies and behavior. Yet, after twenty years, most observers agree that none of the U.S. sanctions on the SLORC/SPDC have met our goals. Sanctions have had some impact on Burma’s textile industry, according to David I. Steinberg who estimates the embargo closed 64 textile factories, but not enough to impress the need for change on the regime.²³³ At the same time, critics can point to sanctions having had all sorts of detrimental effects on workers, many of whom are women who likely fall into the sex trade after textile jobs are lost.

There are several reasons why sanctions have failed to sway the junta. First and foremost, regardless of the regime’s policy to open itself up to foreign investment and trade, the SLORC/SPDC has not had to rely on the U.S. and EU to build up foreign currency and markets. Burma’s trading partners in Asia, with China in the lead, have allowed the junta to generate wealth without needing the West. Second, even if sanctions’ unintended impacts on the population could have led to the population rising up and trying to force a change in government, the ruling junta has shown thus far that it is capable of putting down popular rebellions. Finally, the SPDC has demonstrated repeatedly that it has little regard for the welfare of the Burmese people. Never was this more evident than in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis when the junta initially refused foreign aid and assistance.

Sanctions against Burma are based on the assumption that the junta will adjust policy in response to economic incentives (or disincentives) when in fact the generals are

²³¹ White House Fact Sheet, “President George Bush Announces Added Sanctions Against Leaders of Burma’s Regime,” *The American Journal of International Law* (2007), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071019-15.html> (accessed 26 May 2009).

²³² Ibid.

²³³ David I. Steinberg, “Burma/Myanmar: The Triumph of the Hard-Liners,” *South China Morning Post*, August 15, 2003.

much more concerned with enforcing a political monopoly, and holding onto power, rather than maximizing their own economic advantage.²³⁴ The regime is not just promoting its own propaganda when, as stated in Chapter I, it prioritizes the three main national causes (national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national solidarity) over economic prosperity. This orientation justifies the SLORC/SPDC's actions no matter how brutal—and, in the junta's eyes, validates its legitimacy.

B. LEGITIMACY AND SOVEREIGNTY

When analyzing sanctions it seems worthwhile to step back and ask why the sanctions were enforced in the first place. In theory, the U.S. put sanctions in place to induce the SLORC/SPDC to stop its human rights abuses and to punish the regime for failing to uphold the results of the 1990 elections. The sanctions were levied by the U.S. to promote democracy through Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, and to weaken the illegitimate government of the SLORC/SPDC. In the West's view, the fact that the SLORC did not abide by the elections in 1990, and relinquish power to Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD makes it illegitimate. Engaging in repressive control measures, human rights abuses, and drug trafficking only compounds the junta's negative image. So the U.S. deemed the junta illegitimate, this begs the next question: how many more delegitimizing acts does the regime have to engage in before the U.S. will feel impelled (or compelled) to intervene?

Since the end of the Cold War, causes for U.S. intervention have varied. In the 1990s, the U.S. intervened in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia largely for humanitarian reasons. Furthermore, in 1999, a U.S. led NATO coalition forced Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to end ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo and, according to Harvard professor Stanley Hoffman, “a new norm was established: collective intervention against a government committing human rights violations could be justified.”²³⁵ The precedents for humanitarian intervention established in the 1990s gave

²³⁴ Seekins, “Burma and U.S. Sanctions: Punishing an Authoritarian Regime,” 448.

²³⁵ Thomas Nichols, *Eve of Destruction: The Coming Age of Preventive War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 30.

way in the new millennium to sovereignty breaches following the attacks of 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq for the sake of curbing terrorism.²³⁶

C. THE UNITED STATES AND BURMESE SOVEREIGNTY

1. Indirect Approach

The likelihood is remote that the U.S. will engage Burma militarily solely for humanitarian purposes or to enforce the outcome of the 2010 elections. The American public, given current commitments, will not support sending a sizable number of troops to Burma for anything less than an emergency situation. What some in Washington might decide to do instead is employ an indirect unconventional warfare (UW) approach with Special Forces working with the ethnic minority insurgents and pro-democracy movement to encourage regime change. But even an indirect approach with a small footprint is infeasible for several reasons.

The Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia (indirectly) are engaged in counterinsurgencies or anti-terrorist campaigns. Transnational terrorists find sanctuary in Bangladesh. North Korea tested a nuclear device in 2006 and again in 2009. Cambodia is trying to re-establish stability following years of internal strife. In 2006 testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, the PACOM Commander highlighted 19 Asian countries as regional priorities or interests without mentioning Burma.²³⁷

To execute unconventional operations in Burma would require that the U.S. secure basing access in a border country. Given current ties to the junta, Thailand, India, and Bangladesh would be hesitant to support cross-border U.S. operations to train and advise Karen, Shan, Chin, and Rohingya insurgents. Also, Burma's remaining insurgent groups (those who refused to sign ceasefire agreements) have been weakened by years of conflict with the Tatmadaw. They have yet to agree on their strategic goals, while the pro-democracy movement remains as distant from them as ever.

²³⁶ Stephen D. Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty," *International Political Science Review* (2001) 231. In this discussion, sovereignty refers to Westphalian/Vattelian sovereignty or the rule of non-intervention in the internal affairs of others.

²³⁷ Samantha L. Quigley, "War on Terror Victory Tops PACOM's Priorities," *US Fed News Service, Including US States News* (2006).

2. Future Engagement in Burma

At present, the insurgent and pro-democracy groups continue their rebellions with little support from external allies. The upcoming 2010 elections may present an opportunity for the groups to elevate their cause(s) onto the international stage if the election is corrupted or nullified by the SPDC. In the meantime, what are viable options for U.S. engagement?

Retaining sanctions will not significantly impact the regime. Nevertheless, to abandon sanctions in favor of constructive engagement will benefit the regime. Such a move would provide little assistance to the population. According to COL (RET) Tim Heinemann, who has worked extensively in the region with ethnic groups, hill tribes and pro-democracy activists, the power base of the junta rests with generals Than Shwe at the head, and Maung Aye as his deputy.²³⁸ COL Heinemann adds that the two leaders differ with Than Shwe being more corrupt and power-driven, while Maung Aye is a professional soldier with a loyal following among the general officer corps. Psychological operations targeted at the heads of the regime could be effective given their superstitious beliefs and differing outlooks.²³⁹

As Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute points out, NGOs offer some degree of access to Burma. NGOs conducted relief efforts in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis:

“...it is possible to work with the military regime on humanitarian issues. Communication between the government and international agencies has improved. Visas and travel permits today are easier to get than before. Requirements for the launch of new aid projects have been eased. By and large, the authorities are making efforts to facilitate aid, including allowing a substantial role for civil society.”²⁴⁰

However, most are reluctant to cooperate with the U.S. government.

In the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, ASEAN did initiate disaster response exercises, first in Thailand in 2008 followed by an exercise in the Philippines in 2009. The United States could play a key role in future Asian disaster relief and could

²³⁸ Heinemann, Tim, interview by Dennis Heaney (January 27, 2009).

²³⁹ Ibid

²⁴⁰ Doug Bandow, “Rangoon Renaissance,” *The National Interest Online* (2009) <http://www.nationalinterest.org/> (accessed May 7, 2009).

potentially use preparedness training to gain access to Burma. For instance, through regional assessments of the infrastructure in ASEAN countries, the U.S. should be able to push survey teams into Burma for disaster relief preparation.

3. Nuclear Intervention

Is there anything today that might compel the United States to do more? Two issues that could lead the U.S. to take concerted action are to halt work on nuclear weapons or to stop a possible pandemic. In 2007, Burma and Russia signed an agreement for construction of a Russian nuclear research reactor in Burma. The SPDC appears ready to pursue a nuclear program, which would enable the junta to eventually develop a nuclear weapon that would create a quandary for the U.S. To prevent another North Korea or Iran, the U.S. might feel justified to attack Burma's nuclear infrastructure early in development with Special Operations Forces.

But, realistically, is this something the U.S. would do? Intervention in Burma is complicated, in part because Burma has achieved some international legitimacy through its relationships with regional powers, China and India, and its membership in ASEAN. An attack on Burma would provoke not only a regional, but also an international response, and surely the majority of Asian countries would not support such an attack despite a potential nuclear threat from Burma. With China's (and Russia's) veto power and track record, a UN Resolution for intervention would die quickly in the Security Council and forming a coalition would also be politically difficult. It is likely the U.S. would have to act unilaterally if it acted at all.

4. Pandemic Intervention

Burma also has the potential for a pandemic influenza outbreak which could potentially spread throughout the country and then beyond its borders. The country is woefully unprepared for such an outbreak. For example, lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis) remains highly endemic in Burma due to a weak medical infrastructure, large populations of displaced individuals, and health care workers subjected to arrest and

abuse for perceived support of insurgents.²⁴¹ A pandemic, which would expand rapidly within Burma, would spread quickly beyond Burma's borders. Eliminating the source would be difficult, especially for a government unprepared to deal with such an outbreak, and one that would probably be reluctant to accept foreign assistance to contain the virus. Again, a forced intervention may be necessary to contain the disease and to provide care to the sick and dying.

D. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

For the future of Burma, the best-case scenario would be for the 2010 elections to be held, for the SPDC to lose the popular election, then honor the elections, step down, and allow a new popular government to take power. This is highly unlikely to occur. But, even in this ideal situation, Burma's new leaders would face the challenge of uniting the country's ethnic minorities who would no doubt demand autonomy or a federal system of government. The new government would also have to re-energize the economy in an attempt to halt or slow inflation. There is the potential for elements of Than Shwe's Union Solidarity and Development Association to form insurgencies, but the biggest challenge would be to integrate the Tatmadaw into the new government, subordinate to democratic civilian rule. No matter who rises to power in Burma, they will have to deal with the Tatmadaw.

The U.S. also, should consider how it might work with the Tatmadaw, if not directly, then indirectly. Perhaps engagement can start small by planting long-term seeds. For instance, Burma currently sends officers to other countries in the region for military schooling and training. Singapore educates Burmese officers in its military schools, and U.S. officers attending Singaporean military schools with Burmese officers can try to develop relations with their Burmese classmates in order to foster rapport for mil-to-mil cooperation 10-15 years in the future.²⁴²

At present though, and aside from its drug 'exports,' Burma poses little direct threat to U.S. national security. Terrorist groups do not emanate from Burma and pirates

²⁴¹ Chris A. Beyrer, "Neglected Diseases, Civil Conflicts, and the Right to Health," *The Lancet*. August 24, 2007. <http://www.lexisnexis.com/> (accessed March 19, 2009).

²⁴² Ellis "Web of Cash, Power and Cronies," 2.

do not impede shipping off the coast. Ideally, the U.S. might increase pressure on countries in the region to divest from Burma, similar to what occurred in South Africa where international pressure in the form of boycotts weakened the South African economy.²⁴³ But as already noted, countries in the region have too much of a stake in Burma to side with the U.S. and divest.

President Bush's statement found at the beginning of this thesis, points to Burma's real threat. Given our declared policies and Burma's humanitarian abuses and rejection of democracy, we may have hoisted ourselves on our own petard. The United States' reputation as an ethical and moral world leader has been closely scrutinized since the 9/11 attacks. The Obama administration initially planned to re-evaluate sanctions and contemplated opening trade with Burma. However, in response to the junta's decision in May 2009 to charge Aung San Suu Kyi with allowing an American to enter her home, President Obama extended sanctions against Burma for another year. He stated:

The crisis between the United States and Burma...has not been resolved...These actions and policies are hostile to U.S. interests...For this reason, I have determined that it is necessary to...maintain in force the sanctions against Burma to respond to this threat.²⁴⁴

Even U.S. presidents with differing political philosophies find common moral ground when dealing with the Burmese regime. However the practical options open to U.S. engagement with Burma are few. At a minimum, the U.S. can maintain indirect engagement and maintain the moral high ground. Someday, authoritarian rule in Burma will fall, and when it does, the U.S. will re-engage Burma with at least a clear political conscience.

²⁴³ Judith A. White, "Globalisation, Divestment and Human Rights in Burma," *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship* (2004), 51.

²⁴⁴ BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Obama Extends US Sanctions on Burma," BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific (2009). <http://www.lexisnexis.com/> (accessed May 17, 2009).

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